

The films of Kenneth Anger and the sixties politics of consciousness

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The Films of Kenneth Anger and The Sixties Politics of Consciousness

Matthew Hughes

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This thesis is an enquiry into avant-garde filmmaker Kenneth Anger's stated impetus for aesthetic practice, in that his approach is characterised by a desire to elicit a 'transformative' response from the spectator: "I chose cinema as the mode of personal expression for its potential and capacity for disruption: it is the surest means to incite change."¹ This central animating principle of Anger's practice has been fundamentally neglected in what little critical writing that already exists on his work. Whilst this intent is framed within an esoteric religious paradigm – the occult – my contention is that it must also be understood as part of a much wider socio-historical political process. I argue that as a personal friend of many within the Beat and psychedelic movements, Anger's practice should be understood as part of the US countercultural drive to 'revolutionise consciousness'. This aspiration was prompted by the widespread belief within the Sixties US counterculture that 'normality' was a state of implicit alienation, and that the undermining of standardised forms of subjectivity was necessary in order that a more authentic mode of existence be found; either as a prerequisite for wider structural change, or, as in the romantic psychedelic movement in which Anger was associated, as a qualifier for change in itself. This particular 'politics of consciousness'² of the Sixties – as propagated by a spiritually inflected, romantic anarchist strain in post-war US society – was based upon the utopian belief that the transformation of individual consciousness was a method of facilitating widespread revolution. I see this aspiration as a utopian expression of the refrain 'the personal is political' that came to popular fruition in the Sixties, in which the consideration of one's own life was a political concern in itself. In this politics of consciousness, the Sixties countercultural paradigm saw the idealised forms of subjectivity produced by post-war US capitalism as serial, standardised, and crucially, 'inauthentic'; as something to be overcome, with aesthetic production playing a fundamental role in this process. I argue that Anger's Sixties work must be read in much wider relation to the socio-political discourses of its time than has been previously afforded in what little critical writing on Anger's work that exists to date.

¹ Kenneth Anger, "Application d'Artifice," trans. Alice Hutchinson, in Alice Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger: A Demonic Visionary* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), p. 15. I must thank the translator, Alice Hutchinson, for allowing non-speakers of French such as myself access to what I consider to be a key statement by the filmmaker.

² I have adapted this terminology from Theodore Roszack, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), and Robert C. Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven: Drugs in American Religious History* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000).

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Author's Declaration

I, Matthew Hughes, hereby state that the material contained within this thesis is all my own work.

Introduction

Jack English: Do you set out to subvert the audience?

Kenneth Anger: Well, 'subvert' is the wrong word. Subvert is like I'm trying to do something dirty to them. I'm not trying to do anything dirty to them. I'm trying to open their minds.³

As a filmmaker, Kenneth Anger has been described as “one of the most important of the 20th century.”⁴ Along with Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage, he is considered one of the central figures in the development of avant-garde film within the United States. Mainstream filmmakers as prestigious as David Lynch, Martin Scorsese, and Gus Van Sant⁵ acknowledge him as being an immense influence upon their own work, with Van Sant describing Anger as “the original independent filmmaker.”⁶ He is cited as being among the very first Queer filmmakers to deal with such material on screen, and is held by figures such as Isaac Julien as being essentially the pioneer of the New Queer Cinema movement of the 90s.⁷ With his 1964 work *Scorpio Rising*, Anger is credited with the informal invention of the

³ Jack English, “Profile of Kenneth Anger,” *On Film* 11 (Summer 1983): p. 45.

⁴ Sanjiv Bhattacharya, “Look Back at Anger,” *The Observer*, August 22, 2004. www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/aug/22/fiction.features6.

⁵ This list can also be extended with the addition of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Ken Russell, Vincent Gallo, Derek Jarman, and many more.

⁶ Gus Van Sant, “On Kenneth Anger,” *The Films of Kenneth Anger: Volume Two*, Fantomas DVD booklet (San Francisco: Fantomas, 2007), p. 13.

⁷ Anger’s influence is reflected in comments made by contemporary art-film practitioners:

“‘Anger has been a huge inspiration,’ says the London-based film installation artist, Isaac Julien. ‘His films are meditative in the poetical, aesthetic sense. They really developed the vocabulary for the new queer cinema in the early Nineties.’ Louise Wilson, of the sibling collaborators Jane and Louise Wilson, is simply ‘in awe’ of Anger’s work: ‘It’s always a shock to look at the dates of his work - he was always so far ahead of his time.’ Doug Aitken, who exhibited at Victoria Miro gallery last November, is similarly dazzled: ‘It’s ironic that you have an individual coming out of the left and yet his influence becomes this mainstream language of popular media,’ he says. ‘Without Stan Brakhage, Bruce Conner and Anger, you wouldn’t have the popular media of today - the colourisation, the jump cuts, the fetishisation of objects.’” (Sanjiv Bhattacharya, “Look Back at Anger”)

music video.⁸ He is also credited as penning one of the very first celebrity gossip exposés in his landmark writing *Hollywood Babylon*.⁹ He is undoubtedly one of the most important filmmakers in the history of cinema, yet he remains relatively unknown. Critical writings on Anger are somewhat limited, with few books in print containing serious academic analysis of his work.¹⁰ Perhaps even more striking is the fact that the central impetus for Anger's aesthetic practice has not been considered in such critical engagement. The intent to render a 'transformative' cinematic aesthetic has remained both explicit and consistent throughout his many years of filmmaking. In a seminal 1971 interview with Tony Rayns and John DuCane, Anger stated: "Every film I've ever made has tried to impose upon the mind of the watcher an alternative reality."¹¹ That ideally, he would like to "project his images directly into people's heads."¹² In a 1950 essay 'Application d'Artifice', which featured in *St Cinema de Pres* - and is the eloquent statement from which this present work arose - Anger wrote: "I chose cinema as the mode of personal expression for its potential and capacity for disruption: it is the surest means to incite change."¹³

In this aim, Anger's entire practice is informed and sustained by the esoteric teachings of occultist Aleister Crowley. Born in 1875, Crowley has a very unsavoury reputation due to his overt and highly publicised dealings in ritual sex,

⁸ A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), p. 62.

⁹ Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon: The Legendary Underground Classic of Hollywood's Darkest and Best Kept Secrets* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1981).

¹⁰ The only works that contain substantial critical analysis of Anger's practice are Jack Hunter, ed., *Moonchild: The Films of Kenneth Anger* (London: Creation Books, 2001), and Jayne Pilling and Michael O'Pray, eds., *Into the Pleasure Dome: The Films of Kenneth Anger* (London: BFI Publishing, 1989). Alice Hutchinson's *Kenneth Anger: A Demonic Visionary*, whilst a beautifully constructed monograph, contains little critical analysis of his films.

¹¹ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Tony Rayns and John Ducane, "Dedication to Create Make Believe," *Time Out*, November 1971, p. 48.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Kenneth Anger, "Application d'Artifice," p. 15.

drugs, and anti-Christian diatribes. Such activities led him to be dubbed by the popular press of the time, “the wickedest man in the world.”¹⁴ Despite the persona constructed by the press of the era – and which has persisted to this day – for Crowley, magick – which he spelt with a ‘k’ in order to differentiate it from mere stagecraft¹⁵ – was a serious endeavour; a spiritual discipline in which the individual, through ceremonial practice, engages in an ontological quest for ‘consciousness-expansion’; much like the use of certain drugs, meditational disciplines, yoga, etc. Crowley’s magick is a complex esoteric philosophy in which the individual harnesses the myriad aspects or forces of the psyche in an effort to achieve psychical ‘liberation’; as Crowley argues: “Man is ignorant of the nature of his own being,”¹⁶ and that magick is the process by which the psyche undertakes “the solution of all complexes.”¹⁷

Crowley’s spiritual system was drawn from ancient Judaeo-Christian writings, Hindu and Buddhist models of Tantra, the Quabalah, Gnosticism, Taoism, and the more modern thought of François Rabelais, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Arthur Schopenhauer. It is, in essence, a thoroughly modernist, Victorian-era philosophical paradigm, with an emphasis upon both Western and Eastern spiritual schools – a distinct metaphysical master-narrative, in which the realisation, or actualisation of the ‘authentic self’ is the ultimate, teleological

¹⁴ P.R. Stephensen, letter to J.K. Moir (1952), quoted in Stephen J. King, “Mandrake and the Magician: P.R. Stephensen and the ‘Legend’ of Aleister Crowley” in P.R. Stephensen, *The Legend of Aleister Crowley* (London: Helios Books, 2007), p. 3.

¹⁵ There are other, more esoteric reasons for the addition of the letter ‘k’. In the words of John Symonds and Kenneth Grant: “K is the eleventh letter of several alphabets, and eleven is the principle number of magick...it corresponds to the power of *shakti* aspect of creative energy...Specifically, it stands for *kietis* (vagina) the complement to the wand (or phallus) which is used by the Magician in certain aspects of the Great Work.” (John Symonds and Kenneth Grant, introduction to *Magick*, by Aleister Crowley [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986], p. xvi)

¹⁶ Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (New York: Dover, 1976), p. xvi.

¹⁷ Aleister Crowley, *The Law is for All* (Arizona: New Falcon Publications, 1996), p. 32.

culminate. Anger has overtly stated that his “lifework is magick” and the cinematograph his “magickal weapon.”¹⁸ Magickal procedure utilises ceremonial ritual in an attempt to engineer and foster states of ‘psychical growth’ within the participants. As such, I argue that Anger attempts to induce such shifts within the cinematic spectator. Anger’s primary methodological influence, Sergei Eisenstein, compared his art to “*a tractor ploughing over the audience’s psyche*,”¹⁹ attempting to move the audience “*in the desired direction* through a series of calculated pressures on its psyche.”²⁰ Just as the Soviet master defined his work as an aesthetic vehicle of class-consciousness actualisation through the assayed conveyance of ideological imperatives, I argue Anger’s cinema is construed as a utopian instrument of consciousness expansion. As such, it is from the province of Western hermetic lore – most specifically, that of Crowley’s interpretation – that Anger approaches his particular activity of artisanal cinematic creation.

Critics are noticeably hesitant in their acknowledgement of this central, and indeed overwhelming motivational impetus behind Anger’s work; to elicit an affective, liberatory response in the spectator. I believe this is due in no small part to the fact that such intent is framed within an esoteric metaphysical paradigm, and therefore many seem reluctant to engage with Anger’s work in this manner. Ultimately, one cannot know if Anger’s films function on such a level, and debates of this kind invariably collapse into the none-more contentious realm of belief. As such, a consideration of esoteric metaphysics in relation to aesthetic practice is inherently problematic. Indeed, one can recall a statement by experimental

¹⁸ Anna Powell, “The Occult: A Torch for Lucifer,” in *Moonchild: The Films of Kenneth Anger*, p. 53.

¹⁹ Sergei Eisenstein, “The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form,” in *The Eisenstein Reader*, ed. Richard Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1998), p. 56.

²⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, “The Montage of Film Attractions,” p. 35.

filmmaker and scholar Nicky Hamlyn on Anger's friend and fellow filmmaker Stan Brakhage - who was himself influenced profoundly by mystical doctrines - when Hamlyn quite rightly argues that such critical approaches "lead backwards into untenable metaphysical ideas about soul and origin, from which discussion is displaced into vague, a-historical notions."²¹

Whilst the central aim of Anger's practice has been fundamentally neglected in critical writings on the filmmaker, there have been very eloquent elucidations by Tony Rayns,²² Anna Powell,²³ and Carel Rowe²⁴ of the occult symbolism that permeates his films. This is an admirable avenue of enquiry in itself, and it is not my intention to denigrate the work of such first-class scholars. Yet the scholarship that exists concerning Anger's relation to the occult takes into account little of the socio-historical forces within which the works were produced; focusing instead on unravelling the hermetic symbolism that pervades his films. I would argue that using Crowley's spiritual system as a mode of detailed critical engagement with Anger's work - while necessary in order to decipher the symbolism contained in his films - is perhaps a little limited, and would tell us very little of the wider conditions in which the films operate. Crowley's ideology is a particularly hermetic, self-contained system, that whilst borrowing from many of the world religions, synthesises such concepts in a particularly self-referential form. This is not to say that I am in any way denigrating the spiritual systems on which these films are founded, as for many people they are profoundly important spiritual

²¹ Nicky Hamlyn, "The Roman Numeral Series," in *Stan Brakhage: Filmmaker*, ed. David E. James (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), p. 114.

²² Tony Rayns, "Lucifer: A Kenneth Anger Compendium," *Cinema* (UK), no. 9 (October 1969): pp. 23-31.

²³ Anna Powell, "The Occult: A Torch for Lucifer," pp. 47-103.

²⁴ Carel Rowe, "Myth and Symbolism: Blue Velvet," in *Moonchild: The Films of Kenneth Anger*, ed. Jack Hunter (London: Creation Books, 2001), pp. 11-46.

disciplines, but I believe the analysis of such forms within an academic context as applicable to film would leave the majority of readers a little cold. Instead, I argue that such metaphysical notions can be fully addressed in an inquiry into the historical specificity of the films' production. Rationalist critics such as Hamlyn are understandably reluctant to engage with occult symbolism, and while others have translated this symbolism in Anger's films, they have somewhat neglected the wider cultural content in which such particular spiritual ideas gained their currency. By treating these ideas in their historical context, one can avoid being drawn into metaphysical speculation – indeed, one can give full weight to the specificity of their cultural and historical location.

Anger was an integral - yet somewhat unseen - factor in the political considerations of the specific strain of the Sixties countercultural²⁵ project to 'revolutionise' consciousness. It is within this context that we may find the potential to discover a great deal more about not only Anger's practice, but the Sixties themselves. As a distinct presence – both personally and aesthetically – in both the counterculture of the Sixties and the Beat Generation which preceded it, I argue that Anger's practice is an expression of the aspiration for what his contemporary and friend Allen Ginsberg described as a "magic politics...a kind of theatre and poetry sublime enough to change the national will and open up the consciousness of the populace"²⁶; a distinctly utopian project. Early instances of Anger's work may have predated the disturbances of the Sixties, but much like the

²⁵ The nuances of this term are explained in due course.

²⁶ Allen Ginsberg, "Berkeley Vietnam Days," *Liberation* (January 1966): pp. 42-47, quoted in James J. Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Postwar Radicalism* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 223.

Beats, his work is carried by the rejection of Fifties US cultural hegemony, and as a result, I believe must be read alongside those reactive shifts.

I argue that the Sixties²⁷ is the historical point at which Anger's practice manifests the most eloquent expression of his stated aims of rendering a cinematic aesthetic of 'transformative force'. Any attempt at the categorisation of Anger as a particular type of filmmaker is extremely difficult, due to the fact that his stylistic aesthetic has changed so dramatically over the course of his career. However, there is most certainly a strain within his work - namely *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1966 version) and *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969) - that is nothing short of pure psychedelia. I believe Anger's particular engagement with the psychedelic aesthetic must be read in relation to the notable strain within the psychedelic movement that attempted to utilise aesthetics as a tool of consciousness expansion. By reading Anger's work in relation to what Diedrich Diedrichsen has termed "the psychdelic discourse,"²⁸ I attempt to offer an interpretation of Sixties psychedelic ideology of consciousness transformation in relation to filmic aesthetics, using Anger as my primary guide through this terrain. I am in no way suggesting this is the definitive interpretation of this discourse, but rather, I hope that by utilising influential source material of this particular era, I may build a credible picture of the ideas which animated the psychedelic film-art of the period.

Anger is first and foremost a psychedelic artist in the true meaning of the word psychedelic, as the definition is particularly illuminating in this respect: "The term itself, in fact, contains no etymological reference to drugs: *psyche-delia* means

²⁷ The applicative 'the Sixties' is a contested area in itself; an issue I address in due course.

²⁸ Diedrich Diedrichsen, "Veiling and Unveiling: The Culture of the Psychedelic," in *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, ed. Christoph Grunenberg (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 85.

simply to 'make clear' or 'visible' the mind."²⁹ I propose that just as Eisenstein sought "the maximum intensification of the emotional seizure [*zakhvat*] of the audience which, for art in general and revolutionary art in particular, is decisive,"³⁰ Anger's work is constructed in order to function as an active agent of psychical 'liberation', in direct correlation with the aims of the psychedelic movement at large. Anger's aspiration to render a psychically transformative filmic aesthetic has always been regarded as something of an oddity; a rather quaint and personal eccentricity that is consistently relegated to being of limited relevance, if indeed it is acknowledged at all. I believe it is actually very important, in that it is representative of a far wider trend within post-war American film aesthetics.

Such intentions do not arise independently of any wider context, but implicitly within the socio-historical conditions of the time, and therefore it is important to understand the dominant discourses that informed the production of such works, regardless of the veracity of the filmmaker's beliefs and intent. Although I am attempting to understand the aesthetic practice of a specific individual, I believe such work can only be understood in direct relation to the historical context in which it arises. The very essence of my thesis is the exploration of the discourses that gave rise to the climate in which such artifacts of esoteric metaphysical transformation were produced. I am firmly committed to the premise that in the realm of post-modernity, the myriad levels of inter-textuality bring with them a universe of potential interpretive responses. In the words of Manuel DeLanda: "If indeed every culture and subculture inhabits its own conceptually constructed

²⁹ Jonathan Harris, "Abstraction and Empathy: Psychedelic Distortion and the Meaning of the 1960s," in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, eds. Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p. 10.

³⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form," p. 56.

reality, then the world and the future become open again. Far from being completely given in the past, the future is now unbound, the world itself becoming a text open to innumerable interpretations.”³¹

Once an aesthetic artifact is ‘dropped’ into the pool of the cultural sphere, through the myriad procedures that entail its reception and dissimulation, a ‘viral’ effect undoubtedly occurs, moving beyond the initial point of cultural inception in a complex, non-hierarchical dissemination and permeation throughout cultural experience. I would argue that we are all subjects of history, and thus my particular reading of Anger’s work owes more to a consideration of the socio-cultural conditions of the films themselves, paying particular attention to their attendant relation towards the counterculture of the Sixties. To focus solely upon Anger as an individual would indeed be very reductive, but to take into account Anger’s participation in the wider socio-political processes in which he was engaged, with his films read as integral parts of these processes, I feel constitutes a vital topic of study. I believe these films are specific examples of the bohemian drive within post-war avant-garde cinema that was concerned with the attempted metaphysical emancipation of the subject. This is, in all likelihood, a particularly utopian project, but it is a vitally important factor in the wider socio-historical conditions of the period. I feel that the metaphysical, spiritually inflected strain of the post-war US artistic counterculture has not been afforded the level of scrutiny it truly deserves. Anger’s personal ideology is a particularly fringe religion, yet one that resonated in many ways with the spiritually inflected strain of the Sixties counterculture. Whilst I do not ignore the occult or spiritual facets of such

³¹ Manuel DeLanda, “Deleuze, Diagrams and the Open-ended Becoming of the World,” in *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory and Futures*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 30.

practice, I see them as part of a wider cultural trend within US post-war society. There is a serious heritage of filmic aesthetics concerned with spiritually informed consciousness alteration that I believe needs to be traced within critical analysis of the Sixties, and in my exploration of Anger's practice, I hope that I am in some way contributing to this ongoing project. Psychedelic art and critical writings on psychedelic drugs are both sorely neglected areas of research in academia. As for the psychedelic art produced in response to the experiences generated by such substances, Christoph Grunenberg has described how "its aesthetic, political and social radicalism, it seems, has been obscured by a veil of bright colours, ornamental all-over patterns and general over-indulgence in decorative surplus."³² I hope that this study may in some small way contribute towards correcting this omission.

I argue that Anger was part of a bohemian visionary tradition in post-war America which, rather than advocating programmatic political change, opted for the propagation of a utopian consciousness revolution of expressive protest; a form of spiritually inflected romantic anarchism. David Martin describes how "these anarchists tended to concentrate on the liberation of the repressed psychology produced by civilisation and its discontents, or on the achievement of that liberation through sex, art and aesthetic education."³³ I see this desire for psychical emancipation as a political question, a distinct facet of a particular form of Sixties counterculture thought; what may be termed 'the politics of consciousness'. I see this as an element of Sixties culture in which the

³² Christoph Grunenberg, "The Politics of Ecstasy: Art for the Mind and Body," in *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, p. 13.

³³ David Martin, "R.D. Laing," in *The New Left: Six Critical Essays*, ed. Maurice Cranston (London: Bodley Head Ltd, 1970), p. 181.

transformation of consciousness was considered a central factor in political action. This proposition was, I believe, based upon the countercultural questioning of the dominant models of subjectivity propagated by the US post-war capitalist system, coupled with the belief that a truer level of existence lay underneath such linear and standardised forms of subjectivity. A change in consciousness was thus seen as either a prerequisite for wider social action – as we shall see in the example of the New Left - or as in the case of Anger and the romantic anarchist strain to which he was affiliated, a qualifier for change in and of itself. This latter strand saw programmatic change of the political system as inherently flawed. Whilst I have a number of reservations about the actual feasibility of such an approach,³⁴ I believe the romantic strain occupies an extremely interesting and vital topic of research, as it was most certainly a huge force within American cultural life during the Sixties.

This strain is implicitly opposed to the homogenous conception of ‘psychical normalcy’ associated with orthodox models of subjectivity - the very subject that constitutes the ideological battlefield of the Sixties politics of consciousness. Within this strain, the dissolution of normative modes of consciousness aims to break down constrictive, habitual modes of subjectivity; a fragmentation of the homogenous, repressed, egoic psychical construct. The writer who I feel embodies the structure of feeling³⁵ surrounding the politics of consciousness of the Sixties within the US, along with the bohemian visionary impulse that metamorphasised into the psychedelic movement of the Sixties, and, most of all, encapsulates totally the fight against the repression imposed by ‘normality’, is the radical psychiatrist

³⁴ In relation to my own political beliefs, I would argue that it is not enough that a change in consciousness occur on a subjective level; there must also be a radical programmatic agenda.

³⁵ This use of Raymond Williams’ terminology is addressed shortly.

R.D. Laing. Laing was the central animating theorist for the psychedelic discourse of which Anger was most certainly a member, and thus I believe is best suited to elucidate the structure of feeling in which Anger was directly operating.³⁶ Whilst Laing has fallen out of favour in current academic discourse, I argue throughout this thesis that his work was of absolute importance to the Sixties countercultural aspiration for the 'psychical emancipation' of the individual. Despite his falling from the intellectual map in somewhat spectacular fashion, I see my efforts as part of a wider re-evaluation of Laing's work that has begun in recent years.³⁷ I hope my work may assist in some small way towards the re-evaluation of an individual who I believe to be a very important figure in the ongoing struggle for liberation.³⁸

³⁶ Herbert Marcuse was a strong candidate, but in the end I felt Laing encapsulated not only far more of the psychedelic movement - to which Marcuse was at times critical (a stance which eased somewhat in his latter years) - but more importantly, the questioning of the nature of consciousness within the US counterculture itself. Timothy Leary was also another potential candidate. Leary's work is extremely patchy however, and whilst his early theories were very important in the establishment of behavioural psychology in the US, he offered little substantial critical writing on the diagnosis of the Western malaise. Laing was the most appropriate writer I could find who expressed not only the Sixties structure of feeling regarding the psychopolitics of the era, but a serious articulation of particular facets of Anger's ideology in a wider socio-political context.

³⁷ Probably the most prominent promoter of the reassessment of Laing is Professor Daniel Burston, with whom I have been lucky enough to have been in contact. Prior to recent re-evaluations of his work, Laing maintained a small yet resolute following in the US, Australia, and in particular Europe; primarily Switzerland, where The Institute for Laingian Studies is located. A recent publication that addresses Laing's influence is Lisa Appignanesi's *Mad Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), which includes a section on Laing that acknowledges his importance in the field of mental health; presenting him as a powerful opponent of inhumane and demeaning psychiatric practices. A recent work that draws upon the pioneering work of Laing is Peter K. Chadwick's *Schizophrenia: The Positive Perspective, Explorations at the Outer Reaches of Human Experience* (London: Routledge, 2008). Richard P. Bentall's *Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature* (London: Penguin Global, 2004), the winner of the British Psychological Society Book Award in 2004, also acknowledges Laing's contributions. Another notable work that includes Laing's theories is *Psychosis and Spirituality: Exploring the New Frontier*, ed. Isabella Clarke (London: Wurr, 2005).

³⁸ In an article in *The Times*, Karin Goodwin writes: "Professor Anthony David, a specialist in schizophrenia at the King's College Institute of Psychiatry in London, said Laing, who died in 1989, was finally gaining the recognition he deserved. 'People may still believe a lot of what he said was misguided but they are now willing to see there were things of value in his work'" (Karin Goodwin, "LSD Guru foiled 1960s Drug-Plot," *The Times* [October 8th 2006]: www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/scotland/article665179.ece). The psychiatrist Anthony Clare, who interviewed Laing for his seminal BBC Radio series 'In The Psychiatrist's Chair', described how Laing's "apocalyptic message shaped and reflected ideas and passions prevalent at this time and contributed to the bracketing of the mentally ill with the criminal, the racial outcast, the 'sexual deviant' and the political dissident in a coalition of oppressed bearers of an authentic statement concerning the human condition" (Anthony Clare, *In the Psychiatrist's Chair* [London:

In Chapter One of this thesis, I provide a definition of the counterculture as a complex, rhizomatic cultural phenomenon which is primarily concerned with the political question of consciousness. I explore the argument that due to the very specific nature of the Sixties cultural/theoretical climate, there is a tension between modernist and postmodernist modes of thinking, analysis, and being itself.³⁹ The proposition that the countercultural movements retained modernist drives is important for my work, as I argue that in concordance with the countercultural movement at large, Anger's practice retains a totalising, utopian aspiration towards inducing an experience of psychological liberation within the subject, however fleeting this may be. I argue that part of this modernist drive was expressed in the emphasis upon the concept of authenticity, as opposed to that of the inauthentic psychological existence of the subject. Whilst the progressive movements of the Sixties contained postmodern elements of difference, pluralism, and heterogeneity, I argue that some aspirational elements of the American Sixties counterculture contained certain modernist drives as regards the impetus toward the realisation of 'authentic' modes of consciousness. I firstly explore the establishment of the search for authenticity in Anger's early film *Fireworks* (1947), and then progress to paint a picture of the structure of feeling concerning the wider socio-political conditions in which Anger was operating; the restrictive, and crucially, alienated forms of American culture in the Sixties, and the establishment

Mandarin, 1994] p. 202).

³⁹ This line of argument was drawn from the work of Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and Robert S. Ellwood, *The 60's Spiritual Awakening: American Religion Moving from Modern to Postmodern* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994). The aforementioned scholars all forward the proposition that a tension between modernism and postmodernism may be considered one of hallmarks of a variety of discourses within Sixties culture.

of the proposition that the counterculture was a direct questioning of 'normalcy' in relation to notions of subjectivity.

Chapter Two is dedicated to exploring the differing approaches towards implementing change within the given era, and the situation of Anger's practice within the socio-political aesthetic vein that was integral to these very processes themselves. Looking at the personal approaches toward politics that were present in the era, I trace an aesthetic vein within the Sixties, primarily represented by the Beat Movement, which constituted a romantic anarchist subculture concerned with the visionary restructuring of society through 'mystical' consciousness alteration. I outline Anger's place within this movement, and his importance within the establishment of a propagated mode of utopian consciousness revolution; that of the visionary impulse. I then proceed to address questions on the relation between mysticism and politics that emerge from such thematic concerns.

Chapter Three moves onto an exploration of the shift of the visionary impulse into the widespread culture of the psychedelic Sixties. I show what I believe to be Anger's adherence to what Dietrich Diedrichsen has described as "the psychedelic discourse,"⁴⁰ outlining the manner in which the ideas that constituted this particular discourse were interpreted during the Sixties. An integral aspect of the Sixties discourse surrounding both psychedelics and the politics of consciousness, is a concern with what may be deemed 'the deconditioning model' – the belief that in order for a liberation of the subject to occur, there must be a process of

⁴⁰ Diedrich Diedrichsen, "Veiling and Unveiling," p. 85.

‘unlearning’ – prospectively attained through the use of both psychedelic drugs and psychedelically informed art. A fundamental aspect of this deconditioning model is the conception of ‘an essence’, hidden beneath the vicissitudes of subjective existence. This issue is, I believe, hugely important for the politics of consciousness of the Sixties. Through a comparison of Laing’s thoughts on the subject and those of another icon of Sixties countercultural thought, Félix Guattari, I hope to describe conflicting issues within the politics of consciousness itself.

Chapter Four presents the primary poles through which psychedelia was understood in the Sixties – that of madness and mysticism - and how such propositions impacted upon both the work of Anger and the wider psychedelic moving-image art of the period. Psychedelic experience in Sixties culture was thought to prompt a form of ‘temporary psychosis’, in which the experience of visionary transcendence was a distinct possibility. Such considerations are directly connected to the Sixties conception of psychedelia and schizophrenia as emblematic of the counterculture’s total rejection of analytic-rationality, and its concurrent potential for insight into existential ‘actualities’ and the realisation of ‘authentic’ modes of consciousness.

In my analysis, I refer to a number of Anger’s films – *Fireworks* (1947), *Rabbit’s Moon* (1950 version), *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1966 version), and *Lucifer Rising* (1972) - but the film that commands the most attention is Anger’s 1969 work, *Invocation of My Demon Brother*. Whilst the themes I convey within this thesis are present in all of Anger’s films to some degree (to which I refer in the text), it is this particular work that I believe to be the most demonstrative of

Anger's intent to render a psychically transformative cinematic aesthetic. Alice Hutchinson appears to concur with this reading when she states: "Probably more than all of Kenneth Anger's films, *Invocation of My Demon Brother* comes closest to that cinematic state of hypnosis the filmmaker sought."⁴¹

As I am sure is apparent, this work is very much concerned with the Sixties discourses relating to Anger's transformative aesthetic. What concerns me most are the ideas and cultural specificities that gave rise to such a particular approach towards filmmaking. The Sixties countercultural view of the self was that of a disjunctive estrangement from a core ontology of being, presided over by an innately repressive, exploitative, and homogenising social order. For Anger, operating from his particular spiritual paradigm, the processes of his films are nothing short of an explicit attempt at the transmutation of that alienated self. The validity and plausibility of such an approach is highly questionable, but it is firmly situated in the utopian aspirations of the American counterculture at large, and, as such, is an eloquent expression of the specific, and perhaps impossibly unique, cultural specificities of Sixties America. Anger is already recognised as a founding father of the 'Cinema of Transgression';⁴² my conviction is that he should be noted as a filmmaker of 'transfiguration'.

⁴¹ Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 163.

⁴² Please see Jack Sargeant, *Deathtripping: The Cinema of Transgression* (London: Creation Books, 1999).

Critical Approaches

Given Anger's aspiration to render an intensely affecting filmic aesthetic, one might initially propose a spectatorial-based model of critical analysis as the most appropriate methodology through which to tackle the question of Anger's alterative filmic craft. Spectatorship studies and approaches that owe more to the experiential analysis of film are an increasingly popular mode of critical engagement; a fact that has been advanced in no small manner by the increasing popularity of critical writings on film that are informed by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. However, my decision not to engage in such a project is in itself a choice that relates to wider debates within film-studies at the present time, and so I believe it is necessary for me to outline the particular methodology that I am utilising, situating my approach in explicit relation to wider theoretical issues within the study of film. Film studies as a discipline is made up of a number of critical approaches which are distinctly non-linear and fragmentary; of methodologies that intersect at various points and seemingly coalesce into cogent and distinct discourses, yet invariably undergo revisionary tracts, ultimately being re-fashioned into new critiques, which continually reflect, influence, and move within ever-evolving critical debates surrounding film. There are numerous, complex strands of critical theory within film studies, and an inclusive historiography of such forms would be a complete work in itself. What I do hope to offer however is an elucidation of my specific approach within the context of contemporary debates within film studies.

Since the late 1970s, within the UK and the US, film-studies as an academic discipline has been predominantly geared towards a perspective informed by cultural theory. It would appear that the movement towards the use of cultural theory in the study of film owed much to a distinct reaction to the dominant models of critical theory that preceded it. Writing on modern film studies, Powell has argued that “in some ways it is still governed by the violent reaction against 1970’s and 80’s ‘Screen theory’.”⁴³ The main body of work produced in that period was grounded in Althusserian Marxism, Structuralism, and Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis. Michael O’Pray describes how, in specific relation to critical analysis of the filmic avant-garde, “*Screen* was the most influential film journal of the 1970’s. It had set out to establish a grand theory of film representation rooted in Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, which depicted mainstream cinema as a realism of reactionary ideological import.”⁴⁴ According to O’Pray however, “*Screen* theory was hopelessly crude when faced with the avant-garde’s predilection for complex disjointed forms and structures in which narrative played no part.”⁴⁵

Such forms of analysis were criticised for their alleged hyperbolic textual approach and inapplicability to wider film texts than those steeped in the very ideology they were reacting against. After such a distinct reaction, the ascendancy of cultural theory came to dominate even the *Screen* journal itself. With the advent of such shifts, film-studies were presented with new and vital discourses concerning gender, ethnicity, etc. Powell has highlighted how “the politics of film

⁴³ Anna Powell, *Deleuze: Altered States and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 6.

⁴⁴ Michael O’Pray, “Undercut and Theory,” in *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writing on Artists’ Film and Video*, eds. Nina Danino and Michael Maziere (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), p. 13.

⁴⁵ Michael O’Pray, “Undercut and Theory,” pp. 13-14.

representation and the economics of the cinematic institution have generated a substantial body of research within culturalism.”⁴⁶ Such approaches have been hugely beneficial to the discipline of film studies as a whole.

Within the 1990s however, a distinct trend began to emerge within the realm of critical theory as applied to film – slowly at first, but steadily gaining impetus - that owed a substantial debt to less obvious facets of Continental philosophy; a distinct concern with the embodied phenomenology of spectatorial response and the emphasis upon the ontological status of film as sensual, material object. This desire emerged in part from the argument by some members of the academic community – to whom I refer shortly - that the direct apprehension of the filmic experience itself was being overlooked. Martine Beugnet has argued that, “in the attempt to define, as methodologically and objectively as possible, categories, historical trends and structures that would serve as a reference system for the study of cinema as a whole, the films themselves become the insubstantial, interchangeable pieces of a pre-existing framework.”⁴⁷ Such propositions state that, to the detriment of the filmic process of projection and reception, and also crucially to the experiential qualities that arise from the assemblage of spectator/screen, the aforementioned pre-existing frameworks form a ‘transcendent arc’ over the very object of analysis, and, crucially, neglect the experiential quality of film viewing itself as a subject of critical analysis.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Powell, *Altered States*, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 28.

⁴⁸ Such approaches argue that this form of analysis perpetually reinforces the representational critical framework that is utilised in engagement with the film-viewing experience; a proposition based on the assumption that the Cartesian model of analysis is implicitly dissociative of the embodied experience, and fixed indelibly within analogical analysis. With this comes the accusation that such approaches have an overt distrust of experiential, phenomenological approaches, seeing them as somewhat ‘flimsy’ and less rigorous than the former methodologies.

This increasing dissatisfaction with representational modes of analysis led to theorists looking elsewhere for approaches towards the filmic event. In this search for alternative approaches, Barbara Kennedy - one of the most vocal supporters of a new, distinct methodology - describes how “a healthy concern with the non-psychical explanations of the material world emanate from both the work of Deleuze, with resonances from Bergson, Spinoza, Nietzsche and others, and also in the work of current post-feminist pragmatics and epistemologies.”⁴⁹ Drawing upon such critical models, a distinct trend towards the emphasis upon the sensorial nature of the filmic event as the central point of concern emerged within filmic discourse; that of the consideration of film as a sensual, embodied experience. One early, pioneering work that utilised ‘a phenomenology of filmic experience’ – to appropriate a variation of the title of Merleau-Ponty’s famous treatise⁵⁰ - was Vivienne Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye*.⁵¹ Laura Marks - whose work in this field is particularly important - explains how, “often informed by a newly revived phenomenology, theories of embodiment begin with the premise that our bodies are not passive objects ‘inscribed’ with meaning but are sources of meaning in themselves.”⁵²

Within the sphere of American-British film studies, theorists such as Steven Shaviro,⁵³ Barbara Kennedy,⁵⁴ Laura Marks,⁵⁵ Anna Powell,⁵⁶ and David

⁴⁹ Barbara M. Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 3-4.

⁵⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁵¹ Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁵² Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of The Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 145.

⁵³ Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1993.

⁵⁴ Barbara Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

Rodowick⁵⁷ pioneered cutting-edge and intellectually stunning works that employed the work of Gilles Deleuze as a distinct methodology for apprehending the filmic experience. As a result, a Deleuzian apprehension of cinema is an increasingly popular model of critical engagement within the research community.⁵⁸ Despite the fact that approaches informed by cultural theory are still primarily utilised in educational film courses throughout the UK, research methodologies that approach the experiential, sensorial nature of the cinematic event, are gaining increasing popularity. There are a number of books on the subject already in print,⁵⁹ with many more forthcoming on the subject of Deleuzian film analysis. The most prominent publication in recent years – and I would argue perhaps the most important – that approaches film from a Deleuzian perspective, is *Deleuze and The Schizoanalysis of Cinema*.⁶⁰ This work is particularly radical within the sphere of Deleuzian informed film-theory, as it prescribes a methodology that confronts perceived limitations in Deleuze's analysis of film itself⁶¹ - a radical Deleuzian project if ever there was one.⁶²

⁵⁵ Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema: Embodiment and the Senses* (Duke University Press, 2000).

⁵⁶ Anna Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) and *Deleuze: Altered States and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

⁵⁷ David Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997)

⁵⁸ In *Screen Journal's* Fiftieth Anniversary issue, a number of the essays utilised such approaches.

⁵⁹ Paul Elliot, *Hitchcock and the Cinema of Sensations: Embodied Film Theory and Cinematic Reception* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2011), David Rodowick, *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), Roland Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Patricia Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), Gregory Flaxman, *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2000), Patricia Pisters, *Micropolitics of Media Culture: Reading the Rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001), David Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), and many more titles.

⁶⁰ Ian Buchanan and Patricia MacCormack eds., *Deleuze and The Schizoanalysis of Cinema* (London: Continuum, 2008).

⁶¹ Deleuze, *Cinema 1: Movement Image* (London: Continuum, 2005) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Continuum, 2005).

⁶² Ian Buchanan writes:

It is reasonable, I suppose, to think that in his two volumes on cinema Deleuze said all he wanted to say about films and that if he left anything out it was because it was

However, within the emergent trend concerning the interrogation of film as sensuous, material experience, a particularly contentious theoretical issue has arisen. This concerns the experiential model's relation – or more importantly for this context, its considered non-relation – towards the socio-cultural historical contexts that generate the given cinematic experience. In their stern rejection of exoteric orders of reference and their affirmed emphasis upon such an exigent form of analysis, the first wave of theorists in Deleuzian inflected film critique – e.g. Steven Shaviro, Barbara Kennedy, and Nicole Brenez – were somewhat loath to situate their work within a socio-cultural historical context. Steven Shaviro perhaps demonstrates this approach most forthrightly when he argues:

The experience of watching a film remains stubbornly concrete immanent, and pre reflective...Cinema invites me, or forces me, to stay within the orbit of the senses. I am confronted and assaulted by a flux of sensations that I can neither attach to physical presences nor translate into systematized abstractions. I am violently, viscerally affected by *this* image and *this* sound, without being able to have recourse to any frame of reference, any form of transcendental reflection, or any Symbolic order.⁶³

It is almost as if in their violent rejection of previous critical approaches, an exclusive, dismissive stance emerged; one that can be seen as leaning towards

beyond the scope of the strictly philosophical framework he legislated for himself. But even if this is true, and I suspect in a certain way it is, that doesn't mean we have to follow Deleuze in ignoring the questions he left unasked and unanswered, which were neither small nor inconsequential. I'm thinking particularly of the interrelated questions of why we watch certain films and just as significantly why we are willing to pay money to do so....His account of cinema is for all its brilliance is rather dry, more a catalogue of effects than a full blooded explanation of how the cinematic machine works...There is nothing to stop us as readers from joining the dots ourselves...to answer them by mobilizing concepts drawn from his other works, particularly *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. The net result of this experiment is a provisional sketching out of a something that can be called a schizoanalysis of cinema. (Ian Buchanan, "Introduction: Five Theses of Actually Existing Schizoanalysis of Cinema," in *Deleuze and The Schizoanalysis of Cinema*, p. 2)

⁶³ Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, p. 31.

something of an a-historical approach, demonstrated most overtly by Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body*.⁶⁴ Crucially, in their mode of critical engagement, they argue that, in Nicole Brenez's words: "Temporarily at least, the film itself takes precedence over the context."⁶⁵

To temper this rather extreme position, however, there has admittedly been a reaction amongst those theorists within the Deleuzian informed film paradigm. Whilst Mark's work *The Skin of The Film* lies firmly within the discourse of analysis that is resolutely based upon embodied spectatorial response, she argues that approaches which emphasise cinema as a perceptual object in itself, to the detriment of its historical contextualisation, are reductive - a proposition with which I concur.⁶⁶ Martine Beugnet, whilst also resolutely of the sensorial, experiential approach, shares Mark's view when she argues: "In phenomenological and aesthetic terms, just as in issues of representation or genre, a cultural/historical backdrop is necessary to apprehend the mutations undergone by the cinema (and the implied changes in the spectatorial experience and perception)."⁶⁷ Anna Powell - another more 'moderate' theorist, who has produced two Deleuzian inflected works that are quite extraordinary in the breadth of their scholarship⁶⁸ - convincingly states that in her opinion, "Deleuzian analyses are not intended to supplant social or psychoanalytical Film Studies with

⁶⁴ This is not to speak ill of the work of Shaviro, as it is a pioneering text in the emergence of Deleuzian informed studies regarding film. Indeed, one can perhaps understand Shaviro's frustrations with the dominant processes he was reacting against; it is just that I feel the work is a little too polemic.

⁶⁵ Nicole Brenez, *De la figure en général et du corps en particulier – L'Invention figurative au cinéma*, trans. Martine Beugnet (Paris: DeBoeck & Larcier, 1998): p. 10, quoted in Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Please see Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, pp. 194-242.

⁶⁷ Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Anna Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) and *Deleuze: Altered States and Film*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

an alternative orthodoxy. They seek to challenge, but also to supplement, existing methods.”⁶⁹

With this emphasis upon the aesthetic object as a source of sensuous experience, I feel there has been some neglect of the socio-historical contexts in which film operates. To lose sight of, or perhaps more accurately to reduce the importance of the operations of the society in which films are produced, would, I believe, damage film studies as a whole. I must explicitly state that I am not suggesting that the work of Continental philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari does not take history into account, as this would be completely inaccurate. I do, however, believe that within some critical writing on film which utilises their work in more experiential forms of analysis, there has perhaps been a neglect of the historical and socio-political contexts in which the films arise.⁷⁰ I must also explicitly state that this is in no way an attack upon the film scholarship of recent years, as it has been a particularly fruitful time for the development of philosophy as applied to film.

In relation to my own work, I believe my approach is one that looks back to classic forms of film interpretation that are grounded in historically based forms of analysis, and the socio-cultural contexts in which film operates, and in this regard, my work is, admittedly, somewhat ‘old school’. Yet I believe there is much to say about the way in which, in this particular case, Kenneth Anger’s work was

⁶⁹ Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film*, p. 208.

⁷⁰ Deleuze and Guattari’s writings constitute an absolutely phenomenal body of work for which I have nothing but the utmost respect. I use many specific instances of their theorems within this work, but not in relation to the analysis of film as such. What I see as problematic is the work of some film scholars who have utilised Deleuze and Guattari’s writings in such a manner as to disregard the socio-historical context of the films subject to critical analysis.

informed by and operated within the historical epoch known as the Sixties. I cannot stress enough that it is primarily the ideas that surround the production of such aesthetic forms that I am concerned with in this thesis. I think of this work as more of a critical engagement with film as social history, in an effort to try to understand the social conditionalities and ideas that gave rise to these films. Whilst this work does include formal analysis of Anger's films, the emphasis is more upon the ideas and social and political conditions in which these films arose, in order that I may be able to relate them to wider historical debates. Whilst I do not ignore the aesthetic product itself, my approach is one that is more contextual and interpretive, analysing the meanings and importance of these works within a political and cultural context. My primary aim throughout has been to try to understand Anger's motivation for consciousness alteration in direct relation to the specificities of the Sixties as an historical epoch. In this, I am first and foremost looking to the socio-political processes which animated the aesthetic production of works associated with this particularly metaphysical expression of Sixties radicalism. I hope that the need for contextualisation within wider historical and cultural conditions becomes itself evident; that one cannot effectively understand the specific qualities of these films without a consideration of the wider realms of the historical and socio-political contexts in which they were made, and that ultimately, such analysis can only enrich our apprehension of Anger's cinematic oeuvre. As such, I hope my work is following the path laid out by such important texts as Lauren Rabanovitz's *Points of Resistance: Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema 1943-71*,⁷¹ Graeme Green's *Film as Social Practice*,⁷²

⁷¹ Lauren Rabanovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema 1943-71* (Urbana: University Of Illinois Press, 2003).

⁷² Graeme Green, *Film as Social Practice* (London: Routledge, 1993).

David E. James' *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*,⁷³ and Julian Suaraz's *Bike Boys, Drag Queens and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema*.⁷⁴ I hope that I am following in the footsteps of David James when he states:

Cinema is never just the occasion of an object or text, never simply the location of a message or of an aesthetic event, but always the site of manifold relationships among people and classes. The particular pattern of optical subtractions that inflects the whole light of the projector may well be a photochemical imprint on a strip of celluloid, and the surface that returns that light to our eyes similarly a specific architecture. But neither is simply that. Each exists only as a moment in larger circulations, whose psychic and material economies are integral to social systems that produce the work of history.⁷⁵

As Gach & Paglen describe: "To understand one's condition is to relate oneself to the surrounding community. In so doing, we open the gates to a world of cultural-production that is not disembodied but intimately connected to a physical reality inscribed by power relations, social politics, and dynamic forces."⁷⁶ As a result of this approach, I have been able to go into a level of detail which has allowed me to distinctly interrogate the historically specific discourses that animated the conditions in which these films arose. There is at present no critical writing on the operations of Anger's practice in relation to the historical conditions in which it arose, as indeed there is no critical attempt to understand why these aesthetic forms came into existence; the specific social and historical conditions that

⁷³ David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁷⁴ Julian Suaraz, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1996).

⁷⁵ James, *Allegories of Cinema*, p. 5.

⁷⁶ Aaron Gach and Trevor Paglen, "Tactics without Tears," *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 1, no. 2 (2003): <http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org/1/TacticsWithout/index.html>.

brought about their very production. I hope that by taking such an approach, other researchers may be able to draw from some of the conclusions I have offered, by virtue of the fact that I have concentrated so specifically upon the socio-cultural factors of their production – an approach which I believe has resulted in my unearthing of what I feel to be new knowledge about Anger and the Sixties.

Sixties Contexts

The terminology that I wish to apply to the distinct period of the Sixties that I am describing is Raymond Williams' influential 'structure of feeling'.⁷⁷ Williams' approach – first presented in his seminal 1977 work, *Marxism and Literature*⁷⁸ – is an attempt to describe generalities within the nexus of interrelations that constitute a given historicised cultural period. Whilst Williams' work is grounded in a classical reading of the Marxist teleology of history - and as such it may seem an all-encompassing definition – it is immensely useful to indicate discernable orders of dominant meanings and values within the seismic shifts that took place within Sixties culture. In this concept, Williams emphasises the experiential; embedded in a matrix of culture with discernable, dominant ideas concerning culture, ideology, and, importantly for my work, conceptions of 'self' or subjectivity:

It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt...We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience still in *process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ This use of Williams' work was adapted from the work of Marianne DeKoven, who also constructs a structure of feeling in her own considerations of the Sixties; in what she sees as the interrelations of modernism/postmodernism in her work *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*.

⁷⁸ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁷⁹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 132.

In understanding the distinct socio-cultural shifts that have engendered the conception of 'the Sixties' as a period that begs further critical study, I argue that a conceptual 'structure of feeling' is warranted. The sensibilities of a given era are not uniform, however, and are situated within complex, mutable, rhizomatic flows of differentiation. However, key lines of influence may be ascertained regarding central events, dominant ideological imperatives, and crucially for this work itself, widely held countercultural postulations concerning the nature of self or subjectivity. As Arthur Marwick has argued:

Periodisation is an analytical device of historians, who, depending upon their particular specialism, perceive certain chunks of the past as having a kind of internal coherence, or unity, or even identity, these 'periods' being divided from other periods by what may be loosely termed 'points of change' or 'turning points', though 'turning points' are seldom abrupt, and no period is hermetically sealed from the one which precedes it or the one which follows it. There is much *prima facie* evidence that, for good or ill, there were important moments of change in the sixties.⁸⁰

It is worth noting that 'the Sixties' is the period which I define as beginning in the late Fifties and ending in the early Seventies. This is a contested area in itself, as many studies of the Sixties vary in their approaches towards the particular application of era-specific designations. My analysis has been informed by those theorists who have provided the basis for my studies of the Sixties as a projected era-specific designatory. These theorists are concerned with the analysis of cultural specificities, be that of visual culture, cultural studies, or other such close readings of periodical trends and cultural formations. Along with theorists such as

⁸⁰ Arthur Marwick, "Locating Key Texts Amid the Distinctive Landscape of the Sixties," in *Windows on the Sixties: Exploring Key Texts of Media and Culture*, eds. Anthony Aldgate, James Chapman, and Arthur Marwick (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000), pp. xi-xii.

David James⁸¹ and Terry H. Anderson,⁸² I see the 1950s and 1960s as part of a distinct continuum - that whilst having notable characteristics of their own, they are considered to be integrally linked.

Given this explicitly historical approach, I believe it is crucial to note the cultural shifts that have accompanied Anger's practice; their influence and place within the socio-political realms of both historical inquiry and contemporary relevance, which are, I very much believe, implicitly linked. Such a consideration of the Sixties is not consigned to the realm of historical documentation, nor removed from critical questions concerning the present. I argue that the Sixties are of particular relevance to the understanding of our contemporary society. That fundamentally, "the sixties continues to occupy a special place in our historical and cultural memory and that representations of the decade frame the very way we think about the contemporary political/theoretical landscape."⁸³ For numerous scholars, the Sixties is perhaps the defining era of the late 20th century. Although writing specifically on Britain in the Sixties, Stephens and Stout exemplify this stance:

Forty years on, the sixties and its culture continues to enthrall successive generations. The persistent influence of the period in music, fashion, photography, design and fine art demonstrates the resilience of its power to fascinate. It was a period of radical and far-reaching change in Britain, perhaps *the* historical turning point of the second half of the twentieth century.⁸⁴

⁸¹ James, *Allegories of Cinema*.

⁸² Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and The Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁸³ Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. viii.

⁸⁴ Chris Stephens and Katherine Stout, "This Was Tomorrow," in *Art in the 60s: This Was Tomorrow*, eds. Chris Stephens and Katharine Stout (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p. 9.

For Howard Brick, the Sixties continue to appear as “a backdrop, a point of origin, or a foil whenever current trends in thought, art, politics, and religion are discussed.”⁸⁵ Also, as Faber describes, the actions of those progressive elements of the Sixties continue to be a vital topic of study “because their acts continue to shape our world. Thus we need to judge their dreams and their deeds, and to recount their successes and failures, if we are to understand our own times....We find much to stir us and much to contemplate as we struggle to make our own history.”⁸⁶

However, the impact of the events of the Sixties upon our contemporary situation is not always considered positive. For some scholars, such as Frances Beckwith, nothing more than a “stinking stew of ethical nothingness is the sad legacy of the sixties.”⁸⁷ Despite the extreme language of the aforementioned quotation, such opinions are important, as they accurately reflect the conservative view of the Sixties. For such commentators, it was a time when moral values were in deep disarray, a factor that they believe has impacted greatly upon our contemporary sphere. For such critics, the Sixties were responsible for the decline in ‘family values’, the widespread proliferation of drugs, promiscuity, the ascent of ‘political correctness’, and many other anathemas for the Right. Roger Kimball’s book *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America*,⁸⁸ is a relatively recent work that, quite simply, argues the changes that took place in the Sixties completely destroyed every facet of American cultural and political life.

⁸⁵ Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. xi.

⁸⁶ David Faber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), p. 6.

⁸⁷ Frances Beckwith, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), p. 24.

⁸⁸ Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001).

Suffice to say, I do not agree with such readings. My position is one of distinct sympathy towards the progressive movements of the Sixties, and whilst I acknowledge that certain aspects of these movements were distinctly unfeasible and linked to essentialist aspirations, my opinion of the period is best summed up by the words of Will when he states: "Whatever one thinks of the other consequences of the decade, the decade is redeemed by what was done in bus terminals, at lunch counters, in voter registration drives on ramshackle porches along dangerous backroads and by all the other mining and sapping of the old system."⁸⁹

I believe the work of aesthetic practitioners such as Anger were integral to such progressive steps, implicitly related as their works are to the unfolding developments of history. Grunenberg describes how "a great many discoveries remain to be made which will help us to understand and appreciate not only the true revolutionary nature of the art and politics of the period, but also how they continue to shape our thinking today."⁹⁰ Despite the differing interpretations of the Sixties among varying ideologies, Will informs us that much of US "national life has been a running argument about, and with, the sixties."⁹¹ That fundamentally, "so powerful were - are - the energies let loose in the sixties there cannot now be, and may never be, anything like a final summing up...Regarding the unfolding of the consequences of the sixties, there is much that is important to say."⁹² I hope the present study will in some small way contribute to such an unfolding.

⁸⁹ George F. Will, foreword to *Reassessing the Sixties: Debating the Political and Cultural Legacy*, ed. Stephen Macedo (Norton and Company, 1997), p. 8.

⁹⁰ Grunenberg, foreword to *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, p. 7.

⁹¹ Will, *Reassessing the Sixties*, p. 3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

1

Alienation and Authenticity

Alienation as our present destiny is achieved only by outrageous violence perpetrated by human beings on human beings.⁹³

- R.D. Laing

Without alienation, there can be no politics.⁹⁴

- Arthur Miller

As previously stated in the Introduction, critical recognition of the impact of Anger's films has occurred primarily in the realm of sexuality as cultural and, by extension, filmic discourse; particularly in relation to Queer theory and the moving image, to which Anger is undoubtedly one of the pre-eminent moving-image aesthetic patriarchs of the 20th century, along with Jean Cocteau and Derek Jarman. His influence upon the cinematic and cultural modes of the Queer community has been profound, with Anger being seen by many within the New Queer Cinema Movement as a key figure for the affirmative representation of homosexuality. Prior to this, however, his early work contributed to the widespread 'acceptance' of filmic material concerning homosexuality, as, in the words of Vito Russo, "*Fireworks* would help to pave the way for the legitimisation of homosexual subject matter onscreen when Supreme Court decisions involving the film's exhibition

⁹³ R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 12.

⁹⁴ Arthur Miller, interviewed by Eric Hobsbawm, "A Millers Tale: An Interview with Arthur Miller," *Marxism Today* (January, 1988): http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/pdf/89_01_40.pdf.

pronounced it not obscene in spite of its homosexual material.”⁹⁵ In this manner, therefore, Anger’s work can most certainly be considered to have had a profound cultural impact, breaking down barriers of sexual norms and alternative modes of sexual iconography.

However, the element of active - what may be deemed conventional - political engagement⁹⁶ has not been read in any critical studies of Anger and his work; a fact highlighted by Rebekah Wood’s words to the filmmaker: “I don’t associate you with being politically engaged,” to which Anger replied: “You may not, but there are causes I’m very much concerned with.”⁹⁷ Within the aforementioned interview, Anger cites the Vietnam War, environmental concerns, and nuclear power as among those more conventional political issues with which he is actively concerned. Yet, the most overt statement of his political leanings is reserved for an extremely tempestuous 1983 interview for the *On Film Journal*, conducted by Jack English. Within the interview, Anger explicitly states that he is “an anarchist.”⁹⁸ In relation to Anger’s practice, this factor has been consistently overlooked. However, I argue it is actually a vitally important aspect, as he approaches politics in a very particular fashion; a manner which is demonstrative of wider social concerns within post-war America, and which can only be clarified by close study

⁹⁵ Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987) p. 89.

⁹⁶ In 1967, Anger was involved in the march on the Pentagon alongside the Yippies, the Diggers, folk band The Fugs, and the many thousands who joined in this seminal Sixties protest, which was ostensibly against the Vietnam War but in fact reflected much larger concerns regarding the socio-political condition of America in the Sixties. At the march, Anger stood atop the Digger’s truck and screamed “out demons, out!” at the Pentagon, set a pentagram aflame, and proceeded to perform a ‘magickal’ ritual for the benefit of the multitude of reporters gathered at the event. It was an occult spectacle that was dramatic and flamboyant; that of an attempted exorcism of the ‘demonic’ forces seen by many to be at work in the Sixties, as represented by the Pentagon. I argue that this peculiar manner of political engagement goes far beyond this minor example, however.

⁹⁷ Rebekah Wood, “Interview with Anger,” in *Into the Pleasure Dome: The Films of Kenneth Anger*, eds. Jayne Pilling and Michael O’Pray (London: BFI Publishing, 1989), p. 51.

⁹⁸ Kenneth Anger, interview by Jack English, “Profile of Kenneth Anger,” p. 45.

alongside such factors. This chapter aims to do just that, by situating Anger's politics alongside the wider concerns of the post-war US culture, which has itself been so integral to the formative development of his cinematic work.

(1.1) Questions of Counterculture

In consideration of Anger's place in the annals of history, he is most commonly held to be, in the words of Alice Hutchinson, "a countercultural icon of the twentieth century."⁹⁹ We must bear in mind, however, that the term 'counterculture' is notoriously difficult to define. It was initially popularised by historian Theodore Roszack in his seminal 1971 work *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*.¹⁰⁰ Whilst scholarly in nature, the book offered (along with *Bomb Culture*¹⁰¹ by Jeff Nuttall) a distinct point of literary contact for the disaffected youth of post-war America, and enshrined the term 'counterculture' within the popular vocabulary. The term first emerged, however, from sociologist J. Milton Yinger's appellation 'contraculture', which Braunstein and Doyle summarise as "a fully-fledged oppositional movement with a distinctively separate set of norms and values that are produced dialectically out of a sharply delineated conflict with the dominant society."¹⁰² I feel such a reading is excessively dualistic however, evoking a sharp socio-cultural distinction in which the permeation and flux that traverse all sectors

⁹⁹ Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Roszack, *The Making of a Counterculture*.

¹⁰¹ Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968).

¹⁰² Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, "Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s & 1970s*, eds. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 7.

of society invalidate such conceptions within the context of lived experience, and I would argue that one cannot reduce these exceedingly complex expressions of culture into such clearly defined dualistic categories.

Whilst the term has fallen into general usage within cultural studies, the counterculture with which we are concerned is the classic movement traditionally associated with the Sixties. However, on the matter of the specificity of the Sixties counterculture, there is also a high level of ambiguity. As Farrell has highlighted, “interpretations of this counterculture have been almost as varied as the counterculture itself.”¹⁰³ However, Arthur Marwick is rather representative of the most common proposition forwarded by academics when he rejects the idea of there having been one unified counter-culture: “The essence of sixties developments, it seems to me, is the coming into being of a large number of subcultures and movements, all in some way or another critical of the established order of things, all expanding and interacting, and ultimately permeating society.”¹⁰⁴

The term ‘counterculture’ has itself become something of a homogenising signifier, which scholars of the Sixties can be particularly guilty of perpetuating.¹⁰⁵ Doyle describes how it has in many ways been established as “a term referring to all 1960s-era political, social, or cultural dissent...This casual inflation of the term ‘counterculture’ into a nebula of signifiers comprehending bongos, protest demonstrations, ashrams, and social nudity rears its head at seemingly any Sixties

¹⁰³ Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 204.

¹⁰⁴ Marwick, “Locating Key Texts Amid the Distinctive Landscape of the Sixties,” p. xiii.

¹⁰⁵ The present author certainly included.

retrospective.”¹⁰⁶ Such an approach does little, however, to take into account the nuances and complexities of a huge area of the social demographic. Howard Brick argues that “it is urgent not to reify ‘the counterculture’, to assume the name denotes a single, very definite thing, for the ideas, practices, and symbols that flourished within the arena of youth nonconformity were always diverse, bound together at best in syncretic ways.”¹⁰⁷ Also for Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed, there was

no single monolithic counter-culture or cultural opposition with a coherent programme. There were diverse attacks on official culture (and that too was a more fissured and de-centered formation than the very term suggests), but in myriad locations - not only within the academy, within arts institutions of all kinds, within publishing, but also within more dispersed spaces around issues of gender, class, race and generation.¹⁰⁸

However, the term ‘counterculture’ is useful in itself as a terminological attribution to encompass the myriad - very much lived and active - cultural reactions against the dominant models of American life, which I argue in part define the structure of feeling within the US during the Sixties.¹⁰⁹ Whilst avoiding sweeping meta-

¹⁰⁶ Braunstein and Doyle, “Historicising the American Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s”, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p.114.

¹⁰⁸ Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed, introduction to *Cultural Revolution? Challenge of the Arts in the 1960's*, eds. Bart Moore- Gilbert and John Seed (London: Routledge 1992), p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Edward P. Morgan expands on this subject:

The Sixties were, in brief, the West’s “pro-democracy movement” – or at least its first phase. The civil rights movement inspired South African liberationists and the European disarmament movement. The United States and its war in Vietnam became prominent targets for international protest. University campuses in both capitalist and communist systems were the scene of growing student agitation, culminating in the upheavals of 1968. The counterculture spread throughout much of Europe. The women’s movement began to emerge in much of the world at about the same time that it flourished in the United States. Ecology activism set the stage for the West German Green movement that arose in the latter 1970s.” (Edward P. Morgan, *The 60s Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America* [Temple University Press, 2001], pp. 5-6)

generalisations, one can deem there to have been a broad reactive trend against the dominant models of subjectivity propagated by the status quo and US mainstream culture; a reactive stance that can loosely be defined as 'countercultural'. Despite the many forms that encompass the term, certain commonalities may be ascertained regarding such reactive stances against the standardised models of subjectivity as offered by capitalism and its particular post-World War Two US incarnation.¹¹⁰ Duncan Reekie has eloquently described this countercultural conglomeration as:

Radical Utopian politics convened by a provisional mass confederation of the diversity of Western oppositional subcultures against the square world: radical student activists, working-class youth, feminists, black and Latin American radicals, peace protesters, anarchists, communists, anti-artists, gay liberationists, ecologists, hippies, heads, freaks, motorcycle gangs and so on.¹¹¹

By using the term 'counterculture' in my own reading, I encompass the progressive movements for change that emerged - or rose to prominence - in the US within the late Fifties and Sixties. These include the New Left, the feminist movement, and the gay rights movement, along with those sectors of society that are more traditionally seen to be the 'classic' countercultural formations, such as the widespread proliferation of non-Western spiritual practices and the forms of subjectivity they engendered, the psychedelic drug movement, and most importantly for our present concerns, the avant-garde arts in their various forms. The inclusion is broad, yet held together through, in the words of Philip D. Beidler,

¹¹⁰ My emphasis here is not upon cultural specificities as such, but rather with idealised forms of subjectivity as propagated by the status quo.

¹¹¹ Duncan Reekie, *Subversion: The Definitive History of Underground Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), p. 139.

“a desire, in post-World War II America, to posit newly imagined notions of personhood as alternatives to an increasingly immense and totally rationalized technology of cultural depersonalization.”¹¹² Brick describes “a counterculture that tended to see itself as a generalized opposition, a movement *sui generis* that promised to challenge totally the social, political, and cultural status quo.”¹¹³ The reading that proposes a historically specific conglomeration of subcultures in a generalised oppositional form is shared by Marwick, as in his listing of the “features which I take to be most characteristic of the sixties as a period of social and cultural transformation,” the first entry is the “formation of new subcultures and movements, generally critical of, or in opposition to, one or more aspects of established society, which expanded, overlapped and interacted, creating conditions of continuous cultural innovation and political ferment.”¹¹⁴

It is important for me to state from the offset that it is the American counterculture which is the main subject of my analysis, due not only to Anger’s active participation within the US movement, but also the fact that he was mostly situated in America during the Sixties. Despite the fact that I am concentrating upon the US counterculture, it is perhaps important to bear in mind the seismic impact of such movements in the United States upon the world at large. Morgan is one scholar who argues along such lines – in a rather US-centric fashion – yet his words are perhaps important to bear in mind for the inter-relations of the progressive movements of the Sixties outside of the United States, when he argues

¹¹² Philip D. Beidler, *Scriptures for a Generation: What We Were Reading in the '60s* (Athens: University Of Georgia, 1995), p. 5.

¹¹³ Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. 116. One cultural expression that was a unifying theme amongst all sectors was the use of drugs. Reekie describes how an “essential constituent was drug (ab)use, which functioned as a radical catalyst at many social, industrial and aesthetic levels, not least of which was the interaction between drug-altered consciousness and the reception and production of culture” (Reekie, *Subversion*, p. 139).

¹¹⁴ Marwick, “Locating Key Texts Amid the Distinctive Landscape of the Sixties,” p. xvii.

that “virtually all aspects of the decade’s movements in the United States were echoed throughout the western world.”¹¹⁵ Whilst I am rather hesitant regarding Morgan’s statement that the changes in America were ‘echoed’ throughout the world - as this does not really take into broad account both geographic and cultural specificities - it is important that the epicenter of Western capitalism was confronted at this time with formidable oppositional cultures and protests, in such a manner and on a scale, that an advanced technological society had never previously encountered.¹¹⁶

An inclusive approach toward the counterculture is by no means universal, however. Stanley Aronowitz has suggested that, “in the early Sixties there were two separate radical cultures – the political activists who became the New Left and the ‘alternative culture workers’ (the artists) – that merged to form the counterculture of the later Sixties.”¹¹⁷ Richard King goes even further, and has argued of the non-programmatic counterculture: “Its concern was changing consciousness and as such is non-political.”¹¹⁸ These statements have a particular relevance to my work, as I very much disagree with Aronowitz and most certainly with King. The latter’s reading is based upon a classical dualistic reading that is representative of the residues of modernism that I believe permeate Sixties

¹¹⁵ Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ Indeed, this relationship between the US and the world certainly must be considerate of reciprocity, as Paul Arthur describes how within the US, “a general tendency to link the counterculture with resistance to capitalism was augmented by a desultory identification with the struggles of Third World countries for self-determination, a romantic self-justification figured in a rhetoric of guerrilla warfare, liberation, and underground cadres” (Paul Arthur, *A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film Since 1965* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005], p. 20).

¹¹⁷ Stanley Aronowitz, “When the New Left was New,” in *The 60s Without Apologies*, eds. Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, Frederic Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984): pp. 24-25, quoted in Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Richard King, *Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972): p. 189, quoted in Farrell, *Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 223.

texts.¹¹⁹ King is writing from a particularly traditional Marxist perspective, and as such – within the Hegelian tradition – these dualisms are of foundational consequence. I disagree with King's analysis of the socio-political movements, as I believe the approaches to change that were specified in the historical period can in essence be thought of as broadly split into three permeable and malleable alliances; that in their distinct approaches towards implementing progressive change, there were indeed various strains of radical approaches towards emancipation.

Firstly, I define the structural approach as encompassing those movements that believed widespread social change could only come through a structural change in the socio-political arena, i.e. the traditional Marxist and labour movement. Secondly, those who believed that subjective consciousness alteration would qualify for wider emancipation and that any structural change was inherently flawed, i.e. the psychedelic and 'beat' culture, of which I argue Anger was most certainly a member. Thirdly, those that believed an integrated approach would qualify for wider social progress, i.e. those within the New Left who saw consciousness change as a necessary prerequisite to either wider implementation of structural change or, more often, active political engagement. It seems that there was indeed a certain amount of disagreement regarding the proposed manner of implementing widespread socio-political reform throughout America. What unifies the latter two, however, is the emphasis upon the primacy of consciousness alteration, either as a prerequisite for change or as a method of liberation in itself.

¹¹⁹ This aspect is addressed in detail in due course.

(1.2) Questions of Modernism/Postmodernism

This friction – and indeed permeation – between the three loosely defined approaches, is, I argue, directly linked with the considerations of modernism and postmodernism that I believe run throughout the Sixties. I have drawn this particular line of inquiry from a variety of writings on the Sixties, including Marianne DeKoven's *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*,¹²⁰ Sally Banes' *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*,¹²¹ Julie Stephens' *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism*,¹²² and Robert S. Ellwood's *The 60's Spiritual Awakening: American Religion Moving from Modern to Postmodern*.¹²³ My methodology of establishing a structure of feeling for the Sixties and the modernism/postmodernism thematic has been drawn primarily from Marianne DeKoven's excellent work. In her reading, she analyses various Sixties texts to argue for the persistence of modernism within the Sixties, and in conjunction with the other aforementioned works, I have drawn upon such theorems to formulate this particular line of inquiry.

I believe the dualisms that existed regarding the proposed 'approaches to change' that were prevalent in the Sixties – and indeed the need to move beyond such dualisms – are evidence of wider questions surrounding modernism and postmodernism that inflect the Sixties cultural landscape. In order to recognise

¹²⁰ Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹²¹ Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹²² Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹²³ Robert S. Ellwood, *The 60's Spiritual Awakening: American Religion Moving from Modern to Postmodern* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

Anger's place within such discussions, we must understand the aforementioned discourses concerning modernism/postmodernism and the Sixties, as within existing critical discourse concerning the era, there is a distinct level of debate regarding the question of the emergence – or conversely, non-emergence – of postmodernism and the projected end of modernism as cultural dominants. Writings that concur with the model that proposes the end of modernism and the emergence of postmodernism – as reflected in particular historical modes – subscribe to what can be called the 'periodisation thesis'. In the words of Andreas Huyssen, such writings assert that "there is a noticeable shift in sensibility, practices and discourse formations which distinguishes a post-modern set of assumptions, experiences and propositions from that of a preceding period."¹²⁴ In this periodisation thesis, the Sixties has been projected by a number of scholars as signalling the emergence of the postmodern as a cultural dominant, and critics that accept postmodernism as a periodical concept in relation to the said era include such theorists as Frederick Jameson,¹²⁵ Thomas Docherty,¹²⁶ and David Harvey.¹²⁷ Whilst the ideological frameworks that outline the works of these respective scholars differ, they all hold that postmodernism began either during, or in the wake of, the Sixties. Jameson, for example, despite his self-acknowledged hesitancy in the periodisation of the concept, writes of postmodernism:

The precondition is to be found (apart from a wide variety of aberrant modernist "experiments" which are then restructured in the form of predecessors) in the enormous social and psychological transformations of the 1960s, which swept so much of tradition away

¹²⁴ Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," *New German Critique* 33 (1984), quoted in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), p. 39.

¹²⁵ Frederick Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2008).

¹²⁶ Thomas Docherty, ed. *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

¹²⁷ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

on the level of *mentalités*. Thus the economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s...On the other hand the psychic *habitus* of the new age demands the absolute break, strengthened by a generational rupture, achieved more properly in the 1960s.¹²⁸

The aforementioned theorists share Jameson's view of this distinct periodisation, although they differ in their critical assertions as to why such a profound shift occurred; ranging from Marxist critique (Jameson, Harvey) to a broader scope of cultural theory (Huyssen, Docherty). Whilst some may argue that the homogenisation of differing theoretical stances into a singular strand of periodisation theory invalidates such an approach, by emphasising their commonalities (namely, an emphasis on the Sixties as the historical conjuncture of such a shift) it provides a useful tool, not only as a periodising concept, but also as a given 'structure of feeling'. Aside from those scholars who have written specifically on the question of modernism and postmodernism, some observers who have more specific concerns in relation to the issue, such as media, religion, or other specificities of cultural theory, have also agreed with the periodisation of the emergence of postmodernism in the Sixties. Ellwood is one such religious scholar who argues: "In America the Sixties were fundamentally a time of transition from modern to postmodern ways of thinking and being."¹²⁹ He describes a "yearning to see issues in dualistic, polar terms – old versus new, truth versus superstition and the like – the flip side of the ideals of progress and the unity of knowledge."¹³⁰ However, "the Sixties finally ended up with so much pluralism that dualism was

¹²⁸ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. xx.

¹²⁹ Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, p. 10.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

defeated.”¹³¹ So too for James, who has argued that the onset of the Sixties heralded the critical assertion that “modernism collapsed no more decisively in the arts than in society.”¹³² For Braunstein and Doyle, it is all too apparent that the Sixties “countercultural mode revelled in tangents, metaphors, unresolved contradictions, conscious ruptures of logic and reason; it was expressly anti-linear, anti-teleological, rooted in the present, disdainful of thought processes that were circumscribed by causation and consequence.”¹³³

It must be pointed out, however, that there is certainly no critical consensus regarding this issue, with some theorists having rejected the periodisation thesis outright, arguing that postmodernism as a particular aesthetic form can be found far earlier than the given period. One of the most eloquent and widely cited examples of this stance is Rosalind Krauss’ *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*,¹³⁴ in which she argues that postmodern forms can be found in early twentieth-century avant-garde art forms. Indeed, there is even little consensus as to what modernism or postmodernism actually entail; if indeed they are usable hermeneutic appellations - an area of dispute in itself. I would not argue that the presence of postmodern forms in earlier historical periods invalidates the periodisation thesis, but rather it remains a useful tool from which to dissect the particularities of Sixties practice as a distinct and important historical period – one that Brick argues has a tendency of “appearing as a backdrop, a point of origin, or a foil whenever current trends in thought, art,

¹³¹ Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, p. 20.

¹³² James, *Allegories of Cinema*, p. 4.

¹³³ Braunstein and Doyle, “Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s,” p. 13.

¹³⁴ Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

politics, and religion are discussed.”¹³⁵ Given the distinct nature of the Sixties as a noted era, modernism and postmodernism are well-established conceptual applications for the consideration of the specificities of the period.

In the particular model I have utilised, the several scholars who subscribe to the previously stated interpretations appear to agree on a particular model of modernism and postmodernism, which is summarised succinctly by Harvey:

Universal modernism has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production. Postmodernism, by way of contrast, privileges heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse. Fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or “totalizing” discourse (to use the favoured phrase) are the hallmarks of postmodernist thought.¹³⁶

Despite the expected differences between these scholars’ opinions, Patricia Waugh elucidates the commonalities found in such accounts regarding the mode of postmodernism that I am utilising for this particular work:

Despite the divergence among these uses of “postmodern” one could find some commonality centering on: a recognition of pluralism and indeterminacy in the world that modern or modernist thought had evidently sought to disavow, hence a renunciation of intellectual hopes for simplicity, completeness and certainty; a new focus on representation or images or information or cultural signs as occupying a dominant position in social life; and an acceptance of play and fictionalization in cultural fields that had earlier sought a serious, realist truth.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. xi.

¹³⁶ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 9.

¹³⁷ Patricia Waugh, introduction to *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Patricia Waugh (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), p. 3.

As the above quote testifies, the periodisation thesis itself generally emphasises the postmodern to the detriment of the modern; yet I argue that the Sixties embody a paradox in which modern and postmodern elements are interwoven in a manner which may suggest that the residues of modernism within postmodernism may be more important than has been assumed in many critical studies. My reading owes more to DeKoven's interpretation which forwards the proposition that "sixties political and cultural movements and their texts were in fact primarily, dominantly, in some ways quintessentially modern; concomitantly with their full realisation and extension of their modern projects, they moved into the postmodern."¹³⁸ DeKoven subscribes to the school of thought that emphasises the modernism appellation in post-modernism - an issue I return to in due course. Banes also argues that "the Sixties embody a paradox: in one direction there is a nostalgic urge toward unity - both social and cosmic - while in the other direction, there is the pronounced affirmation of disunity, disjunction, and fragmentation."¹³⁹ There is a distinct "conflict between unity - the desire for authenticity, spontaneity, and the collective expanded consciousness of the community - and difference - the application of heterogeneity, pluralism, and enhanced individuality."¹⁴⁰

Nicholson argues that such a residue is apparent in the tension between attempts to recognise such diversity and change, and the struggle to qualify those changes within overarching historical frameworks that tend toward meta-narratives of 'truth', 'unity' and 'reason' - terminologies which seem to transcend context-specific boundaries and the very immanence of those specified terms as socio-

¹³⁸ DeKoven, *Utopia Limited*, p. 4.

¹³⁹ Banes, *Greenwich Village*, p. 246.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

cultural-historical constructs. In this respect, Nicholson argues for the persistence of metanarratives within postmodernism itself: "Although from modernity we have come to recognize the importance of historical change and cultural diversity, we have also inherited the beliefs that theorists can create analytical frameworks that transcend such diversity."¹⁴¹

These writers argue that residues of modernism exist within the emergent postmodernism – a quality that I believe can be attributed to the Sixties as a specified historical era. In the words of Huyssen, such a cultural conditionality "operates in a field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first; a field of tension which can no longer be grasped in categories such as progress vs. reaction, left vs. right, present vs. past, modernism vs. realism."¹⁴² However, rather than concentrating upon the emergence of postmodernism, the emphasis here is upon the proposition that the Sixties countercultures within the United States retained certain modernist drives, particularly those of utopianism. DeKoven puts forwards the proposition:

Not that the sixties were postmodern, but that they represented the final, full flowering of modernism/modernity, particularly of its utopian master narratives. In the full realisation and extension of the popular, egalitarian, subjectivist trajectories of the modern, but in rejection or curtailment of the totalizing, utopian master narratives associated with those trajectories in modernity, the sixties political and countercultural movements were transformed...into the "utopia limited" of the postmodern.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Linda Nicholson, *The Play of Reason: From the Modern to the Postmodern* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 9.

¹⁴² Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 145.

¹⁴³ DeKoven, *Utopian Limited*, p. 8.

It is perhaps important to reaffirm that the geographic location to which I am referring in my analysis is the US, rather than a trans-national generality. The American counterculture retained at its core a utopian drive that was rooted in the struggles of modernity for the realisation of 'truth' and crucially, as I later argue, 'authenticity'. My argument is not structured as a defence of the periodisation thesis itself, but rather, as an articulation of the idea that key Sixties textual elements associated with the era's political and countercultural formations existed simultaneously within dominant modern and emergent postmodern paradigms, as a discernable 'structure of feeling'.

What this argument is grounded in, however, is the proposition that postmodernism has retained elements of modernism. Harvey illustrates this issue quite succinctly when he poses the question of "POSTmodernISM or postMODERNISM?"¹⁴⁴ Harvey elucidates:

There is much more continuity than difference between the broad history of modernism and the movement called postmodernism. It seems more sensible to me to see the latter as a particular kind of crisis within the former, one that emphasizes the fragmentary, the ephemeral ...while expressing a deep scepticism as to any particular prescriptions as to how the eternal and immutable should be conceived of, represented, or expressed.¹⁴⁵

The argument that postmodernism contains residues of modernism has also been offered by Best and Kellner, who propose that

¹⁴⁴ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 112.

¹⁴⁵ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 116.

many ideas and phenomena that are claimed to be “postmodern” have their origins or analogues precisely in the modern era....Often what is described as “postmodern” is an intensification of the modern, a development of modern phenomena such as commodification and massification to such a degree that they appear to generate a postmodern break.¹⁴⁶

My concern here is not to enter into such a greatly contested area of debate, but rather to utilise the periodisation thesis as a manner of drawing upon the specific reading that emphasises the presence of modernist drives within the American counterculture. In general critical discourse, those who argue that the postmodern began in the Sixties have a distinct emphasis upon the postmodern itself, rather than a consideration of the residues of modernism. Conversely, what is important for my own work is the reading that whilst they embodied much of postmodernism, many of the Sixties countercultural formations in America contained certain modernist essentialisms. As previously stated, what I hope becomes clear is the presence of modernist and postmodernist traits in the Sixties in close association, with particular emphasis upon the proposition that the progressive movements within the US retained certain specific elements of modernism’s utopian drives, and that Anger’s work was part of these efforts for liberation.

¹⁴⁶ Douglas Best and Douglas Keller, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), p. 31.

(1.3) Authenticity and the Self

With regard to this reading, central to my work on Anger is the argument that the American countercultural movements of the Sixties, in their various forms, retained the aspiration for the realisation of 'authentic' modes of subjectivity.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, that Anger's aspiration to render a 'transformative' aesthetic - one that points the way toward liberation - is a direct, eloquent, and indeed emblematic expression of this wider social conditionality. What is crucial to this reading is the proposal that one of the defining aspects of the intellectual and progressive movements of the Sixties within the US was a utopian ideal to apprehend essentialisms concerning the nature of subjectivity - to follow "the rebellious imperatives of the self" - to reluctantly borrow a phrase from Norman Mailer.¹⁴⁸ It is this aspect that is central to my work regarding the issue of modernism and postmodernism that runs throughout the Sixties. For Brick, the Sixties embodied a "devotion to the ideal of authenticity - of discovering, voicing, and exercising a genuine, whole personality freed from the grip of mortifying convention."¹⁴⁹ Whilst such progressive movements of the Sixties contained postmodern elements of difference, pluralism, and heterogeneity - in the words of Huyssen, "multiple

¹⁴⁷ Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (Columbia University Press, 1998), Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, and DeKoven, *Utopia Limited*.

¹⁴⁸ Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," *Dissent Magazine*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online.php?id=26>. I am particularly hesitant in my quotation of Mailer due to his well-documented racism and misogyny, but I believe this quote is particularly illustrative of the particularities of the return to the 'self' that I argue somewhat encompassed the climate of the counterculture of sixties America. Mailer's assertion of the 'return to the self' were steeped in narcissism however, which denies the communal aspect of the need for authentic and compassionate relations between self and others; a thematic which is certainly not present in Mailer's work. However, I believe the quote is extremely evocative of the particular Sixties zeitgeist that I am attempting to elucidate in this work. Numerous works have testified to Mailer's misogyny and violence, but the first to challenge these aspects within his literary work directly was Kate Millet's seminal 1970 work *Sexual Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁹ Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. 66.

forms of otherness as they emerge from differences in subjectivity, gender and sexuality, race and class, temporal *Ungleichzeitigkeiten* and spatial geographic locations and dislocations”¹⁵⁰ - I argue that aspirational elements of the counterculture (and I am speaking specifically of the movement within America) contained certain modernist drives; that they retained essentialist qualities regarding the drive for the realisation of ‘authentic’ modes of consciousness.

Roszack asserts that “the counterculture is, essentially, an exploration of the politics of consciousness...a means to a greater psychic end, namely, the reformation of the personality.”¹⁵¹ The politics of consciousness is the belief that the transformation of consciousness was an integral factor in the process of liberation. The question of subjectivity, in particular the bringing forth of an ‘authentic self’, I argue is at the heart of the counterculture of Sixties America. Such a desire is grounded in a perceived existential sense of alienation; that of a perceived estrangement from authenticity; a dislocation of ‘being’. During the Sixties, many progressive movements within the US were at their core propelled by the struggle for, and the desire to actualise, authentic expressions of subjectivity. Qualified by this, however, is the intermingling of modernism and postmodernism within the Sixties; a level of ambiguity regarding the nature of subjectivity - to recall Banes, a distinct “conflict between unity – the desire for authenticity, spontaneity, and the collected expanded consciousness of the community – and difference – the application of heterogeneity, pluralism, and enhanced individuality.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Huyssen, *Mapping the Postmodern*, p. 50.

¹⁵¹ Roszack, *The Making of a Counter-Culture*, p. 156.

¹⁵² Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, p. 244.

However, if, as stated, my contention is that the counterculture of Sixties America was concerned with the transformation of the conditional self from a state of alienation to authenticity - and that Anger's practice is a distinct expression of this wider cultural concern - what was the conditional mode of being that demanded such a process of transformation be actualised? The very question of the politics of consciousness is connected not only with assumptions within the Sixties counterculture regarding the conditional nature of the self, but intimately connected with the socio-political processes that constitute the given society. As is obvious, the need (and call) for authentic modes of existence is dependent upon a presumed dislocation and alienation from an idealised form. The countercultural drive for subjective authenticity did not appear from abstracted ideological theorems, but rather, as Dickstein argues, "they were acting out of the logic of their own lives, although it sometimes took the language of ideology to convince them that their discontent mattered. The tremors of the sixties, which shook institutions in so many remote corners of society, were generated from society's own deep core."¹⁵³

As Alice Hutchinson highlights, "Anger's images are often icons taken from a fatalistic, sick and dying society."¹⁵⁴ A central facet of the structure of feeling of the Sixties is, I argue, a drive within the US counterculture towards liberation from an oppressive material and psychical state of alienation. Joe Austin describes how "many of the fires that blazed in the 1960s were first lit during the 1950s."¹⁵⁵ The turmoil of the Sixties in the US was founded in many respects upon the rejection of

¹⁵³ Maurice Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 69.

¹⁵⁴ Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁵ Joe Austin, "Rome is Burning (Psychedelic): Traces of the Social and Historical Contexts of Psychedelia," in *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, p. 194.

the Fifties socio-political climate. It is impossible to understand the distinct nature of the Sixties without addressing its immediate forerunner, in which social and historical forces generated the highly specific, and impossibly unique nature of the subsequent era. Indeed, this was the era in which Anger was a teenager trapped within the suburbs of California, and is the point at which he began to produce his first films. What I wish to offer now is by no means a comprehensive social-historical overview of the period, but rather to provide evidence to support my proposition that the US counterculture of the Sixties was driven by a distinct sense of alienation; one that was concurrent with the call for authentic experience. Subjectivity is not dislocated from the surroundings, but is implicitly tied to the social and material conditions of the era; hence, the progressive drive for civil rights and liberties that ran throughout and, in essence, partly defines the Sixties. My aim is to situate the work in the arena most pertinent to Anger's practice; namely, the assumed nature of the 'alienated self' and its need for authentic modes of being. With this in mind, what was the conditional state from which the counterculture believed it needed to rescue itself?

(1.4) Conditions of The Search for Authenticity

Within the post-war period, the US experienced a growth in economic benefits quite unlike anything in modern history up until that time, and the effect upon the culture of the US, was "the complete domination of American society by the economic sensibility, discouraging completely any significant participation of the imaginative sensibility in the social, political, and economic affairs of society," in

the words of Amiri Baraka.¹⁵⁶ John Kenneth Galbraith termed this period ‘The Affluent Society’, in his book of the same name.¹⁵⁷ With such a dramatic increase in economic prosperity, a significant boost in the US arts was also experienced. A.L. Rees explains the importance of the late Forties and early Fifties in relation to the filmic avant-garde, outlining the economic and aesthetic factors that combined to create such a distinct period:

Many currents ran together to produce this extraordinary period. They comprise the wartime presence of modernist writers and artists from Europe, a new self-confidence, a need to emerge from Europe’s shadow (once European modernism had been absorbed into the bloodstream), an economic boom, the availability of equipment and cameras, a generation of artists prepared by the public funding and commissioning of the Roosevelt years, and of course the model (or counter-model) of American Hollywood Cinema as a leading home-grown industrial and cultural industry.¹⁵⁸

Importantly however, Rees notes that “many of the films which were made did not directly reflect the optimism and ‘new birth’ which is such a strong feature of much post-war US art, dance and music. Often they were dark and parodic, as in the psychodrama, and expressed elemental fear and anxiety.”¹⁵⁹ Rees introduces here

¹⁵⁶Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed from It* (New York: William Morrow, 1963) quoted in Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 40.

¹⁵⁷ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (London: Penguin, 1999).

¹⁵⁸ Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 57.

This progressive activism was engendered on the University campus, and it was here that the seedbed of revolutionary action blossomed. Eric Hobsbawm summarises the critical trend in a passage I believe is worth quoting at length from his seminal *Age of Extremes*:

“The very youth of the student body, the very width of the generation gap between these children of the post-war world and the parents who remembered and compared, made their questions more urgent, their attitude more critical. For the discontents of the young were not blanketed by the consciousness of living through times of staggering improvement, far better times than their parents had expected to see. The new times were the only ones that young men and women who went to college knew. On the contrary, they felt things could be different and better, even when they did not quite know how. Their elders, used to, or at least remembering,

a particularly important element, as the ‘anxiety’ of which he speaks is highly expressive of wider cultural currents within the US; elements that are integral to both the social conditionalities of the given period and, crucially, to Anger’s aspiration to render a transformative cinematic aesthetic.

The perceived mainstream social climate was defined by a sanitised somnolence; yet beneath the veneer was a distinct dissatisfaction with the dominant ‘models’ of American life; models geared almost exclusively to the advancement of economic prosperity and the ideal of the family of consanguinity, replete with its archetypal, standardised forms of subjectivity. Dissatisfaction gestated from widespread popular discontent in the wake of what Doyle defines as “America’s shrill postwar triumphalism.”¹⁶⁰ As Young states, the discontent that emerged on a national level grew from the fact that “the Sixties were centrally about the recognition, on the part of an ever-growing number of Americans, that the country in which they had thought they lived – peaceful, generous, honorable – did not exist and never had.”¹⁶¹ Many of the right-wing political persuasion look back upon the Fifties as a ‘golden age’ that was held to have been generated by the dominance of ‘traditional family values’, economic stability, and a distinct post-war euphoria. However, many social commentators hold the position that this was an idealist veneer. Farrell is one such critic:

times of hardship and unemployment, did not expect radical mobilizations at a time when, surely, the economic incentives for them in the developed countries was less than even before. But the explosion of student unrest erupted at the very peak of the great global boom, because it was directed, however vaguely and blindly, against what they saw as characteristic of *this* society, not against the fact that the older society might not have improved quite enough.” (Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* [London: Michael Joseph, 1994] p. 301)

¹⁵⁹ Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 57.

¹⁶⁰ Braunstein and Doyle, “Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s,” p. 8.

¹⁶¹ Marilyn Young, foreword to *Imagine Nation*, p. 3.

Although the affluent society provided for people's material needs, the members of the counterculture felt that it also institutionalized alienation. Factories reduced human beings to a series of repetitive motions. With their specialization and division of function, bureaucracies substituted functionaries for people. Population movements in metropolitan America, reinforced by the mobility of dedicated careerists, meant the disintegration of urban neighborhoods and the splendid isolation of the suburban single-family home. Schools and sports reinforced the competitive individualism of the business culture.¹⁶²

This resulted in a culture in which, in the words of Braunstein and Doyle, "getting and spending were no longer considered activities performed primarily to sustain life; they became synonymous with social life itself, its reason d'être."¹⁶³ Herbert Marcuse, in his unparalleled critique of post-war capitalist culture, *One Dimensional Man*, wrote: "The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment."¹⁶⁴ This is reflected in Anger's belief that "America is the Pleasure Dome of the world...The materialistic dream is so strong, that you have to be of the purity of Parsifal to banish Klingsor's castle."¹⁶⁵ That ultimately, "there'll always be a price to pay for these artificial paradises."¹⁶⁶

It was within such a climate that a number of prominent books were published that questioned the dominant notions of American society and culture. One of the most influential was Jane Jacobs' 1961 publication *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*,¹⁶⁷ an attack upon the multitudinous expansiveness of urbanisation

¹⁶² Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 205.

¹⁶³ Braunstein and Doyle, "Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s," p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 11.

¹⁶⁵ Tony Rayns and John DuCane, "Dedication to Create Make Believe," p. 49.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: The Modern Library, 1993).

and the endemic alienation it wrought. C. Wright Mills' work was immensely popular, particularly his 1958 publication *The Causes of World War Three*.¹⁶⁸ Mills decried what he saw as the 'cult of alienation' that arose in the US after the war. The feminist publication *Notes from the Second Year* stated that its sole editorial policy was to select works expressive of "authenticity."¹⁶⁹ Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd*,¹⁷⁰ first published in 1961, is a key text in the critique of the lack of authenticity that he argued was prevalent within the young. In the book Goodman puts forward a passionately argued thesis that attributes the increasing emphasis upon economics for the alienation felt by young men, lamenting the disregard for what he describes as 'real experience'; again underlying the particular Sixties modernist call for authentic modes of existence. David Riesman's immensely influential 1961 work *The Lonely Crowd*¹⁷¹ suggested that it was the age of 'malleable', adaptable personalities; consisting of individuals whose dependence upon a sense of belonging among one's peers resulted in a culture which saw inauthentic behaviour as the norm. Ervin Goffman's work was also a huge contributory factor towards the call for authenticity, particularly his 1959 publication *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.¹⁷²

A hugely important factor in the climate of alienation throughout the US, was the socio-political situation of men and women in the African-American community - that of the systematic alienation of a huge sector of US society. The widespread emphasis upon 'the affluent society' was an insult to the African American

¹⁶⁸ C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War Three* (London : Secker & Warburg, 1959).

¹⁶⁹ Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, "Editorial," in *Notes from the Second Year*, eds. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: n.p, 1970) quoted in Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. 68.

¹⁷⁰ Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd* (New York: Random House, 1960).

¹⁷¹ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

¹⁷² Ervin Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1997).

community, whose standard of living was considerably lower than the dominant white community, and who suffered blatant, intolerable racism in every walk of American life. In the realm of gender and sexuality, there was, in the words of Braunstein and Doyle, “a carefully coordinated campaign to reassert patriarchy by pressuring middle-class women to quit the workplace, marry, bear and care full-time for their brood, all the while being confined to suburban tract homes arrayed like so many nuclear family reactors.”¹⁷³ Damning critiques of the imposition of repressive gender roles emerged, including Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*¹⁷⁴ and Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*.¹⁷⁵ Friedan’s work had perhaps the most far-reaching implications relative to gender politics. With information gleaned from a questionnaire Friedan circulated to her college class, she argued that many women were understandably resistant toward the propagation and imposition of archetypal social roles for women, which stated that their highest fulfillment could only come from the family. Friedman describes how this dissatisfaction came from the reinforcement of traditional gender roles by the ideological machinations of the hegemonic social order:

For over fifteen years there was no word of this yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, in all the columns, books and articles by experts telling women their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers. Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity...They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights - the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Braunstein and Doyle, “Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s,” p. 9.

¹⁷⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 2001).

¹⁷⁵ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003).

¹⁷⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 57-58.

For men, the hegemonic social form that dominated the era was challenged by a 'crisis of masculinity'. Brian Baker argues that such 'anxiety' was due in part to the close bonds that many men formed during wartime, an exemplary example of what literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick termed 'homosocial' bonds¹⁷⁷ that in many cases led to homosexual encounters, and, with the end of the war, a subsequent paranoia emerged that there would be a 'continuum' of such relationships in peace-time. In particular relation to the Kinsey Report,¹⁷⁸ Baker elucidates:

The possibility of such a 'continuum' is what provokes such anxiety in post-war America: that the rigorously repressed element of desire in male homosocial relationships may have manifested itself in wartime. This fear was exacerbated by the publication of the first volume of the Kinsey Report in 1948 (on men)...The Kinsey report became something of a *cause célèbre* and a nationwide bestseller, and suggested that homosexual acts were much more widespread than anyone had believed...To counter the possibility of male violence or homosexuality, and the disruption to the familial and economic structures of capitalist America, masculinity had to be re-defined in the post-war period.¹⁷⁹

This 're-definition', argues Steven Cohan, was the propagation of the Western male archetype, with the presentation of such iconography also implicitly linked to economics. In the words of Cohan:

The era's most commonplace representation of masculinity, which linked gender (manhood) and male psychology (maturity) to a heterosexual goal (mating) and economic obligation (breadwinning), functioned to secure the cultural hegemony of the professional-

¹⁷⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ It is something of a fortuitous coincidence that Anger was a close associate of Professor Kinsey, with the two enjoying a close friendship until Kinsey's untimely death in 1956.

¹⁷⁹ Brian Baker, *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres, 1945-2000* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 4.

managerial class in the face of other, older as well as marginalized and excluded, social interests.¹⁸⁰

Anger was no stranger to such forms of prejudice. He was born in the Californian WASP suburbs, into a family who were, according to Anger, “rock-rib republicans.”¹⁸¹ A homosexual, Anger was immediately ostracized after he was arrested in a men’s lavatory for cottaging; an incident which led to him being disowned by his parents and subsequently taken in by his Grandmother.¹⁸²

In the political sphere, “an undeclared war to contain communism in the Korean peninsula ground to an inconclusive truce, while the mania to expose and purge ‘card-carrying’ communists and their ‘fellow traveler’ sympathizers at home undermined the very civil liberties that made up the foundation of our self-described liberal democracy.”¹⁸³ In such an environment, the external ‘threat’ was internalised in eviscerating social and political policies concerned with the question of what it meant to be a ‘true American’. In the words of Braunstein and Doyle:

The cold war’s geopolitical strategy of containment was accompanied by a domestic theatre of operations. There were of course the well-publicized “witch-hunts” for enemies of the state presumed to be lurking in our midst. This thinking gained institutional status under the aegis of the House of Un-American Activities Committee, whose very name, typical of the era, asserted with Manichean certainty that there

¹⁸⁰ Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 35.

¹⁸¹ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Michael O’Pray, BFI Audio Archive (17/01/1990), National Film Theatre, Southbank, London.

¹⁸² Please see Bill Landis, *Anger: The Unauthorized Biography of Kenneth Anger* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), p. 37

¹⁸³ Braunstein and Doyle, “Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s,” p. 8.

was but one way to be a true American; all others would be subject to investigation and prosecution.¹⁸⁴

Post-war affluence and the ideological advancement of capitalist values against the 'shadow' of the external 'threat' of communism appear to be the reciprocally stimulated dominant themes of the era; a most explicit collusion of ideology and industrial production. Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* forwarded the proposition that "the former conflicts in society are modified and arbitrated under the double (and interrelated) impact of technical progress and international communism...Mobilized against this threat, capitalist society shows an internal union and cohesion unknown at previous stages of industrial civilisation."¹⁸⁵ For Kenneth Rexroth – a prominent anarcho-pacifist poet and writer – the culture of the Fifties was determined by the "social lie," in which "people were governed ideologically by a system of fraud."¹⁸⁶

(1.5) Anger and The Existential Turn

This perceived climate of alienation, and its attendant search for authenticity, was aided in no small part by the adoption of Marxism and existentialism into the bohemian intellectual scene in post-war America. Of the post-war era, Brick writes: "The advent of alienation can be traced to the importation of two streams of thought, French existentialism and Marxist humanism, that achieved great

¹⁸⁴ Braunstein and Doyle, "Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s," p. 8.

¹⁸⁵ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, pp. 23.

¹⁸⁶ Kenneth Rexroth, interviewed by Lawrence Lipton, *Bureau of Public Secrets*, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/rexroth/sociallie.htm>.

intellectual currency in American intellectual life during the years just before and after 1960.”¹⁸⁷ As Cahoone describes, both Marxism and existentialism presented “the individual human subject or consciousness as alienated in contemporary society, estranged from his or her authentic modes of experience and being...What was needed, it seemed, was a return to the true, or authentic, or free, integrated human self as the center of human experience.”¹⁸⁸ Regarding existentialism, Brick writes: “The coincidence of existentialist and Marxist currents of thought produced a fruitful muddle including dual notions of alienation, one concerning the plight of the individual in pursuit of meaning and the other addressing the nature of society as a thing apart, beyond control.”¹⁸⁹ As previously stated, I believe that throughout the Sixties counterculture within the US, there was a distinct and very powerful modernist dualism between alienation and authenticity, and it appears that existentialist and Marxist thought were integral factors in the formation of this climate.

Another fundamentally important factor towards the formation of the intellectual climate concerned with alienation, was a particular post-war blend of Marxist and Freudian revisionism, which has come to be known in intellectual discourse as ‘Freudo-Marxism’. This was part of a much wider project that was concerned with the radical revision of the work of Freud and Marx. It was a theoretical convergence that conveyed capitalist society as being determined by repression, alienation, and thwarted, stifled, inauthentic human relations. This renewed emphasis upon Marxist thought was prompted in many respects by the Fifties

¹⁸⁷ Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. 14.

¹⁸⁸ Lawrence E. Cahoone, introduction to *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence E. Cahoone (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. 17.

publication within the US of Marx's early writings; works that owed far more to a humanist emphasis upon the experiential qualities of alienation within capitalism than his latter writings, which emphasised structural economics. Freud also emerged transformed in the Freudo-Marxists; no longer simply the arch-pessimist but a life affirming explicator of the Eros principle. The turn to Freud in conjunction with Marx was motivated in part by an attempt to account for the historical failure of communism – a shift that was prompted by a distinct reaction against 'vulgar Marxism'. Marx's earlier writings are somewhat more Romantic in origin, displaying his obvious debt to classical German philosophy. Roszack describes how "the essays reveal a warm, personalist concern for the individual...[they] elaborate imaginatively upon poetry and music, on play and love, on beauty and the life of the senses."¹⁹⁰ In an interview with Bob Mullan, Laing speaks of his appreciation of the "early Marx that was claimed to be a sort of existentialism, a humanism, Marxism as humanism."¹⁹¹

Freud's later essays "Totem and Taboo" (1913)¹⁹² and "The Future of an Illusion" (first published in 1927),¹⁹³ clearly indicate that Freud believed the psyche to be historically and socially conditioned, and so the particular unison of the two theorists – whilst not without problems – is not as strained as one might initially imagine. This approach had a profound and lasting impact upon intellectual discourse within the social sciences of the post-war era. The synthesis of the two writers was first produced in Germany, within the Frankfurt School. In relation to Freud, what had to be challenged was his insistence upon the primacy of internal

¹⁹⁰ Roszack, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, p. 90.

¹⁹¹ R.D. Laing, in Bob Mullan, *Mad to Be Normal: Conversations with R.D. Laing* (London: Free Association Books, 1995), p. 89.

¹⁹² Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁹³ Freud, *The Future of An Illusion* (London: Penguin, 2008).

over external factors as the determinable factor in human behaviour. The Frankfurt School sought a more integrative approach that, in its utilisation of Freud's theorems, also rejected 'vulgar Marxist' ideology.

Aside from Freudo-Marxism, Rossinow has argued that a highly underestimated influence upon the call for authenticity within the US was the influence of Christian Existentialism.¹⁹⁴ Thinkers such as Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer were read by large sections of the student body in post-war American society. Religious existentialism became a powerful force, and contributed significantly towards the climate of seeking the authentic. As a young bohemian, Anger was caught up in this turn towards existential theory; however, the particular route he would go down was somewhat unconventional to say the least. Writing on Existentialism, Maroney argues: "Crowley's work is part of this stream of thought, but his contributions are not major compared to those thinkers such as Nietzsche on one hand and John Stuart Mill on the other."¹⁹⁵ That effectively, "one might think of him as one of the highly differentiated points on the existentialist spectrum, a kind of occult Kierkegaard."¹⁹⁶ Anger's turn towards Crowley - while unconventional - is not that strange when considered within the wider shift toward existentialist based modes of philosophy that occurred in the US after World War Two, and is completely in-step with the zeitgeist. Whereas the Beats turned primarily to more Eastern doctrines - although Burroughs was very interested in the occult - Anger looked to Western hermeticism.

¹⁹⁴ Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*, pp. 53-85.

¹⁹⁵ Tim Maroney, "Six Voices on Crowley," in *The Book of Lies: The Disinformation Guide to Magick and the Occult*, ed. Richard Metzger (London: Turnaround, 2003), p. 166.

¹⁹⁶ Maroney, "Six Voices on Crowley," p. 174.

Anger's early adoption of the teachings of Crowley in the early Forties as the primary guide for not only his aesthetic practice, but also his life, pre-empted the adoption of Crowley by the counterculture of the Sixties. In Anger's words: "Crowley crept into my life in the cradle."¹⁹⁷ Whilst not wishing to dwell too long on Crowley's philosophy, it is important to consider that one of the central aspects of Crowley's work is the premise that the individual must find their own 'True Will'. This occult belief has a direct correlation with the wider search for authenticity that inflected the US during the Fifties and Sixties. The expression of the 'true', authentic self, lies at the very heart of Crowley's doctrine; a facet that would have a considerable impact on Anger's entire aesthetic practice, as we shall see from the creation of his first widely recognised film.

(1.6) Seeking Authenticity: *Fireworks* (1947)

Within a symbolic fashion, the thematic concern of the search for authenticity is present from the beginning of Anger's first major work, *Fireworks* (1947). Whilst the film was not produced during the active years of political turbulence, and uses none of the filmic techniques aimed at producing an intense sensorial response which Anger would develop in his later practice, it explicitly establishes Anger's conceptual concerns regarding the search for authenticity which I believe is an integral aspect of his oeuvre. Made when Anger was just seventeen, over the course of a weekend at the family house while his parents were away, *Fireworks* (1947) is a hugely influential piece of filmmaking, and is recognised as one of the

¹⁹⁷ Rayns and DuCane, "Dedication to Create Make Believe," pp. 48-49.

very first American films to deal with the overt presentation of homosexual subject matter.¹⁹⁸ When first publicly screened in 1947 at the Coronet 16 Cinema in Los Angeles – an event attended by a number of luminaries of the arts, including Tennessee Williams and John Cage - Williams described it as “the most exciting use of cinema I have seen.”¹⁹⁹ Jean Cocteau, to whom Anger had sent a print of the film, entered the work into the *Festival du Film Maudit* of 1949, where it won the Poetic Film Prize. Cocteau described the film as "coming from that beautiful night from which emerge all true works. It touches the quick of the soul and this is very rare."²⁰⁰ The reaction to the film in France was explosive, with Anger being hailed as a formidable new talent by the Parisian avant-garde.



Fireworks (1947)

¹⁹⁸ Please see Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film, From Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹⁹⁹ Tennessee Williams, quoted in *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of The Film Society*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), p. 173.

²⁰⁰ Jean Cocteau, quoted in *Cinema 16*, p. 173.

P. Adams Sitney has described *Fireworks* (1947) as “a pure example of the psychodramatic trance-film.”²⁰¹ A.L. Rees, writing on the psychodramatic form, describes how, “typically, it enacts the personal conflicts of a central subject or protagonist. A scenario of desire and loss, seen from the point of view of a single guiding consciousness, ends either in redemption or death”²⁰² – themes which bear particular relevance to our present concerns.

The film itself begins with a spoken word piece by the young Anger, recited over a black screen: “In *Fireworks* are released all the explosive pyrotechnics of a dream. Inflammable desires dampened by day under the cold water of consciousness are ignited that night by the libertarian matches of sleep and burst forth in showers of shimmering incandescence. These imaginary displays provide a temporary release.”²⁰³ With this spoken word introduction immediately indicative of the search for the fulfillment of repressed desire, the work explores the search for authenticity on multiple levels, including the psychosexual and metaphysical. Representative not only of a young man’s expression of his sexuality, the work has been linked by Tony Rayns with Crowley’s ritual “Liber Pyramidos: The Building of the Pyramid,”²⁰⁴ which is a ritual of ‘self-initiation’. Initiation within esotericism signals the beginning of the search for self-actualisation, and Rayns has hinted that the events presented in the film are symbolically representative of this occult ceremony.²⁰⁵ In Anger’s synopsis for the work: “A dissatisfied dreamer awakes, goes out in the night seeking a ‘light’, and is drawn through the needle’s eye. A

²⁰¹ P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: the American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 100.

²⁰² Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 58.

²⁰³ Kenneth Anger, spoken word introduction to *Fireworks*, directed by Kenneth Anger (1947; *Kenneth Anger’s Magick Lantern Cycle*, British Film Institute, 2009) DVD.

²⁰⁴ Tony Rayns, “Lucifer: A Kenneth Anger Compendium,” p. 27.

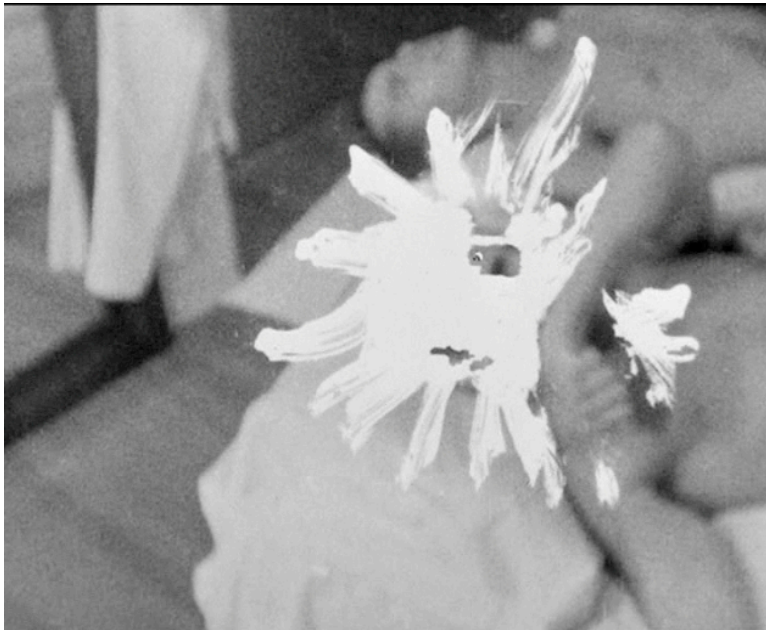
²⁰⁵ Ibid.

dream of a dream, he returns to a bed less empty than before."²⁰⁶ The 'light' he seeks is representative not only of the search for authentic expression of sexuality ('got a light?' was a well known term for initiating a sexual encounter within the post-war US Queer community), but also the light of spiritual illumination.

Near the beginning of the work, we are presented with a slow-pan over the face of a sleeping dreamer (Anger), which cuts to a shot of a statuette of a hand that has been broken (or more accurately, missing two fingers). Immediately, we are presented with an allegory of the fractured self. The dreamer awakes to find that he seemingly has a huge erection protruding from underneath his bed sheet, which in fact turns out to be a wooden statue. After dressing in front of the mirror, and seeing that he has run out of matches to light his cigarette, he goes out into the night 'looking for a light', through a door marked 'GENTS'. After meeting a muscular sailor who assaults Anger - yet curiously, still lights his cigarette for him afterwards - he is subjected to a sadistic sexual attack by a group of sailors; his chest being eviscerated to reveal that his heart is in fact a clock. Returning to his bed, in Anger's words, "less empty than before,"²⁰⁷ we see he is accompanied by a young man, with the culmination of the sequence ultimately resulting in Anger's 'rebirth', and the partnering of him with this man in his bed. Notably, the man obscures his face from the camera in order to hide his identity, with Anger also scratching on the film to obscure the man's face.

²⁰⁶ Kenneth Anger for Canyon Cinema Catalogue, San Francisco, quoted in Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 25.

²⁰⁷ Kenneth Anger for Canyon Cinema Catalogue, San Francisco, quoted in Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 25.

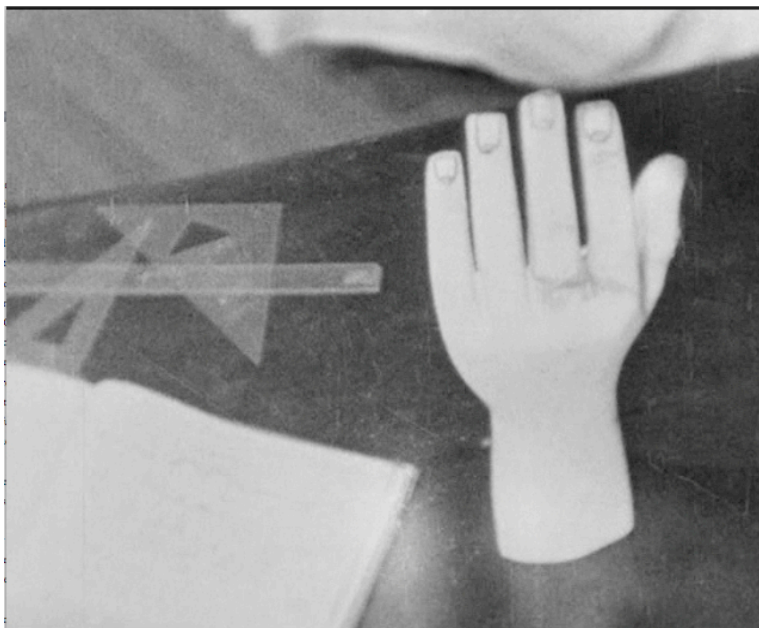


Fireworks (1947)

This in itself is highly indicative of the fact that homosexuality was still illegal at this time in the US. Anger's particular method of obscuring the individual's identity through scratches upon the film, creates a rather beautiful image of a 'solar face' upon the young man. In this image, there is the symbolic representation of the 'solar man' - an ancient symbol indicative of the attainment of enlightenment.²⁰⁸ Crowley's religion is ultimately concerned with the esoteric interpretation of 'solar-phallic worship'; what Crowley - in his Victorian sexism - saw as 'the generative principles'. Fire is also representative of initiation; the burning away of the inauthentic self in order to find 'the light within'. As Anger recounted to William C. Wees: "The last shot in 'Fireworks' is me in bed, and there is another boy in bed but his face is all bursting with white flames, or light. This is the Lucifer brother, you see, the Unknown Angel side. In my own drama as an

²⁰⁸ Israel Regardie, *Foundations of Practical Magic: An Introduction to Qabalistic, Magical and Meditative Techniques* (London: Aeon Books, 2007), p. 25

artist, I am always looking for him, that angel side.”²⁰⁹ The Holy Guardian Angel in Crowley’s system is defined as ‘the true self’, and whilst this differs from a secular interpretation of authenticity, the concern with the actualisation of the authentic self, within the context of our present concerns, is explicit. The film ends by utilising a panning shot similar to that used at the beginning of the work, yet we see that the statuette is now mended; made whole again - psychological authenticity represented through the unified form.



Fireworks (1947)

Whilst *Fireworks* (1947) is not one of Anger’s films that is primarily concerned with the overt sensorial manipulation of the spectator, and as such is not central to our present concerns, it provides a good example of the manner in which the search for the ‘true self’ – be it spiritual, sexual, or another such mode of authentic identity – is the core essence of Anger’s films. It is in his later work that such

²⁰⁹ William C. Wees, *Light Moving in Time: Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 18-19.

concerns become more apparent – and indeed explicit – in their intended relation towards the cinematic spectator.

To bring the timeline forward momentarily, a work that deals with very similar issues to *Fireworks* (1947) is John Luther Schofill's *Filmpiece for Sunshine* (1968). The work is dedicated to Anger, with Schofill describing in his notes for the film how the work was "shaped very much by my obsession with Anger's SCORPIO RISING."²¹⁰ The film is a portrait of a young man struggling with his sexuality, and experiencing the first inklings of the pull towards identity – both sexual and spiritual. In the words of the filmmaker himself, the work "is about the isolation of the adolescent in an anti-life society, the pointlessness of his existence. He can't get sexual satisfaction, and he can't get any other kind either. He is always in prison and always will be. The woman he longs for is not just a woman of flesh but a higher spiritual freedom and beauty. He longs for beauty in an ugly world."²¹¹

(1.7) Normality as Pathology

The search for the expression of authenticity that was both part of the distinct structure of feeling of the Sixties and the main thematic Anger articulated in *Fireworks*, must be understood as part of a much wider social conditionality within post-war US culture. With this emphasis upon alienation as endemic, and the resultant search for authenticity as a central concern, what came to be considered

²¹⁰ John Luther Schofill, *Filmpiece for Sunshine* (1968), Canyon Cinema Catalogue, Canyon Cinema (San Francisco, California): <http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=2048>.

²¹¹ John Luther Schofill, *Filmpiece for Sunshine* (1968), Canyon Cinema Catalogue.

'normal', conventional models of subjectivity, were deeply distrusted by the counterculture. As a result, in the words of Gary Genosko, a "critique of social normopathy - capitalism's schizophrenia - was a widespread cultural phenomenon during this period."²¹² Kenneth Rexroth, in his seminal essay "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation,"²¹³ recounted how "after World War I there was an official line for general consumption: 'Back to Normalcy'."²¹⁴ Irving Howe famously termed this "The Age of Conformity" in his 1954 essay,²¹⁵ while for poet Robert Lowell in his 1959 poem "Memories of West Street and Lepke," the era was described as "the tranquilised Fifties."²¹⁶ For the counterculture, serial, standardised forms of subjectivity, were ideologically represented by the dominant value systems of the hegemonic culture, as represented by white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant patriarchal society. This critique focused upon what the counterculture saw as the "preference to property rights over personal rights, technological requirements over human needs, competition over cooperation, violence over sexuality, concentration over distribution, the product over the consumer, means over ends, secrecy over openness, social forms over personal expression, striving over gratification, Oedipal love over communal love."²¹⁷

²¹² Gary Genosko, *Félix Guattari: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), p. 23.

²¹³ Kenneth Rexroth, "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation," *Bureau of Public Secrets*, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/rexroth/beats.htm>.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Irving Howe, "The Age of Conformity," in Irving Howe, *Selected Writings: 1950-1990* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), pp. 26-50.

²¹⁶ Robert Lowell, "Memories of West Street and Lepke," in *Poets.org: From the Academy of American Poets*, <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15281>.

²¹⁷ Gretchen Lemkieu-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009), p. 8.

The US counterculture argued that the propagated models of subjectivity were dominated by “the work ethic, utilitarian individualism, repressive sexuality, Cartesian rationalism, technocratic scientism, denominational religion, industrial capitalism, lifestyle suburbanism, and compulsive consumerism.”²¹⁸ These dominant value systems were thought to produce a distinct form of estrangement from one’s own ‘true nature’. Sedgwick describes how a fundamental “characteristic of the modern age is an over-emphasis on egoic adaptation to exterior realities, a drive to control the ‘outer world’ at the cost of forgetting ‘the inner light’ of imagination and fantasy.”²¹⁹ Hewison describes how “technological advance has produced an affluent totalitarianism in which mankind is completely estranged from its true nature. The ‘normality’ defined by the scientific world view is in fact an absurd fiction, and mankind must develop a false self in order to be able to cope with its demands.”²²⁰ The Reverend Howard Moody – whose church, St Mark’s in New York, was a hub of avant-garde activity in the Fifties and Sixties – asked how could one not be surprised, “that in the age of ‘the lonely crowd’, ‘the organization man’, and ‘the hidden persuaders’ we would get a generation, or at least a segment, that is sickened on the inside and rebellious on the outside at having seen human existence being squeezed into organized molds of conformity?”²²¹ With the counterculture seeing alienation as the standard form in which subjectivity dwelt, what was seen as normality, began to be seen, in fact, as a form of ‘pathology’.

²¹⁸ Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 204.

²¹⁹ Peter Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics* (London: Pluto Press, 1987), p. 100.

²²⁰ Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-75* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 82.

²²¹ Howard R. Moody, “Reflections on the Beat Generation,” *Religion in Life*, 28 (Summer 1995): p. 427, quoted in Lisa Phillips, “Beat Culture: America Revisioned” in *Beat Culture and the New America, 1950-1965*, ed. Lisa Phillips (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with Flammarion, Paris, 1995), p. 31.

In this structure of feeling concerning the critique of normality – or standardised, conformist modes of subjectivity, and most importantly, the questioning of the dominant forms of linear consciousness – the central animating theorist for both the US and UK counterculture was R.D. Laing. The importance of Laing during this period cannot be overstated. In the words of Martin, “Ronald Laing must be accounted one of the main contributors to the theoretical and rhetorical armory of the contemporary Left. By the contemporary left is meant that soft variant of the utopian urge which has jettisoned the Marx of *Capital* for the spiritual exploration of alienation.”²²² Laing’s work offers not only an appropriate example of the Sixties thesis that stated normality was a state of pathology, but it also provides a theoretical articulation of the proposition that the transformation of subjective consciousness was a necessity in order that wider sociological change could occur; a premise that, as we shall see, had a profound effect upon both the manner of political engagement in the Sixties, and Anger’s filmmaking craft itself.

Importantly, Laing’s adoption as the theoretical patriarch of the counterculture allows an indication of the relation of specific instances of Anger’s ideology with the wider socio-political processes in which he was directly participating – rather than just read as purely a hermetic filmmaker divorced from wider concerns. Whilst I am somewhat reluctant to draw parallels between Laing and Crowley, there are a number of striking similarities. Indeed, Martin has already noted this link between Laing and Crowley: “It is in milieu which invoke visitation by indiscriminate ecstasy that Laing’s writings have their provenance, and it is in a period characterised by Aleister Crowley redividus that they resonate.”²²³

²²² Martin, “R.D Laing,” p. 179.

²²³ Martin, “R.D Laing,” p. 183.

Primarily, both propagated in their writings – admittedly in very different ways – the need for the realisation of the authentic self, which was contrasted against an alienated social order. Both drew upon Gnostic writings for their theories; an emphasis upon the belief that the conditioned world was but a flimsy screen, behind which lay realms of consciousness that were far more ‘real’. Laing articulates – albeit in a more presentable (and indeed compassionate) manner – Crowley’s philosophy concerning the psychopolitics of consciousness, the desire to obtain authenticity, the desire to escape conditioning, and the core belief in mysticism (the latter two points are explained in chapters 3 and 4). Both see the conventional modes of consciousness as being grounded in a distinct denial of the potentialities latent within the psyche. It must be emphasised, however, that Crowley’s particular doctrine lacks the fundamental humanist compassion of Laing’s critique. For Crowley, “man is ignorant of the nature of his own being,”²²⁴ and the entire motivation behind magickal practice is the realisation of the ‘true self’. This metaphysical process is fundamentally concerned with uncovering one’s ‘true will’: a metaphysical correlation of the wider Sixties trend that sought the authentic self, represented in this case by the writings of Laing.

As well as conveying facets of Anger’s personal belief system, Laing was associated with a number of artists who were friends of Anger. Laing was directly involved in ‘Project Sigma’ – a cultural revolutionary venture focusing upon the propagation of art and ideas through the ‘Sigma Portfolio’, which was instigated by his friend, the writer and former Situationist Alex Trocchi. Those involved in this obscure

²²⁴ Crowley, *Magick*, p. 134.

project²²⁵ included William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Michael McClure, Timothy Leary, Alexander Trocchi, Wallace Berman, and Jeff Nuttall. Prior to the release of his most widely read book *The Politics of Experience*,²²⁶ Laing presented the primary concepts in the work “to the writers and artists who were working with him in the ‘sigma’ project.”²²⁷ Laing also produced his own poetic work, *Knots*,²²⁸ in which he outlines the veils of mystification and entanglements that are apparent in interpersonal relationships, and the crying out for authenticity that such estrangement entails.

Prior to his fall from grace, Laing’s *The Politics of Experience*, sold a staggering 6,000,000 copies in the U.S alone,²²⁹ and “transformed Laing from a medium-size British celebrity, and the darling of the British left and artistic avant-garde, into an international celebrity.”²³⁰ Zbigniew Kotowicz writes of Laing’s status:

His public presence was such that he became a household name. He was read widely by professionals and lay persons alike. Books were written about him, interviews with him were conducted and published, references to his works could be found everywhere. His works were almost immediately translated into major foreign languages and he became a voice heard throughout Europe and across the Atlantic.²³¹

It is almost as if his writings were a distinct articulation of the various countercultural concerns of the Sixties:

²²⁵ There is scant literature on the subject of the Sigma project, which is a distinct shame, as it seems an avenue ripe for critical analysis.

²²⁶ Laing, *The Politics of Experience*.

²²⁷ Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 93.

²²⁸ Laing, *Knots* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

²²⁹ Daniel Burston, “R.D. Laing and the Politics of Diagnosis,” *Janus Head* (Spring 2001): <http://www.janushead.org/4-1/burstonpol.cfm>.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Kotowicz, *R.D. Laing and the Paths of Anti-Psychiatry*, p. 1.

His writings and public activity consorted with a number of vanguard trends in society and politics – marxism, the counter-culture, psychedelic experimentation, romantic expressionist literature, the critique of the mental institution, the critique of the family, transcendental meditation, Sartorial existentialism, and Freudian psychoanalysis.²³²

Laing's work itself is complex, and at times (by his own admission) somewhat contradictory. Sedgwick describes

Laing's habit of offering all at once several lines of enquiry which, pushed to any sort of conclusion, would yield obvious inconsistencies. The texts of his works are like the old Egyptian palimpsests, manuscripts with the first draft rubbed away and, while still partially visible, written over by another scribe – in this case Laing himself in a different ideological phase.²³³

I do believe that such criticism of Laing is a little harsh, and it resembles the criticisms of Foucault - that his latter work was so divorced thematically from his earlier output. Laing first received widespread acclaim and notable cultural influence with his 1960 work *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*,²³⁴ which is an extremely eloquent, and rather moving, existential-phenomenological analysis of the schizophrenic condition, and remains Laing's most revered work to this day. The books that followed, *Self and Others* (first published in 1961),²³⁵ *Sanity, Madness, and the Family* (first published in 1964, co-authored with Aaron Esterson),²³⁶ and *Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy, 1950-1960* (first published in 1964, co authored with David Cooper,

²³² Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 69.

²³³ Ibid., p. 69.

²³⁴ R.D Laing, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: 1964).

²³⁵ R.D. Laing, *Self and Others* (London: Penguin, 1969).

²³⁶ R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson, *Sanity Madness and the Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

and featuring a foreword by Sartre himself)²³⁷ continued this strain of resolutely existential-phenomenological thought.

However, it was not until 1967 and *The Politics of Experience*, that Laing's status as countercultural-icon and Sixties 'guru of consciousness' came to full fruition. Kotowicz describes how "after *The Politics of Experience* Laing came to be perceived as a maverick guru of schizophrenics, a leader of society's vanguard who, through experiences of transcendental reality, would break out of the vicious circle in which the modern capitalist society imprisons its citizens."²³⁸ *The Politics of Experience* was fundamentally important to the 'essentialist', subjectivist, and mystical strand of the American counterculture - it was, in every sense, a seminal and landmark piece of writing for the spiritually inflected strain of the American counterculture of the Sixties. The impact of the *Politics of Experience* was immense, not only upon popular culture, but also the psychiatric establishment of the time, who saw Laing as a distinct threat. The primary concepts contained within the work were first presented in 1967 at a series of lectures Laing gave at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and Psychology, in New York. Mullan describes how "he invited his professional audience to consider the following possibility: that the patterns of mystification, confusion and invalidation commonly found in the families of those labelled schizophrenic were themselves part of a wider pattern of oppression, integral elements of the cultural and psycho-social fabric of capitalist societies."²³⁹

²³⁷ David Cooper and R.D. Laing, *Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy* (London: Tavistock, 1971).

²³⁸ Zbigniew Kotowicz, *R.D. Laing and the Paths of Anti-Psychiatry* (Routledge, 1997), p. 3.

²³⁹ Bob Mullan, *R.D. Laing: A Personal View* (London: Duckworth, 1999), p. 111.

In the hypotheses presented by Laing, the prevailing sense of the human condition was one of fragmentation, introjection, and dislocation from 'authentic' experience. For Laing, "humanity is estranged from its authentic possibilities,"²⁴⁰ and he argues that "the relevance of Freud to our time is largely his insight and, to a very considerable extent, his *demonstration* that the *ordinary* person is a shrivelled, desiccated fragment of what a person can be."²⁴¹ Within the work, Laing polemically asserts that "what we call 'normal' is a product of repression, denial, splitting, introjection, and other forms of destructive action on experience. It is radically estranged from the structure of being...The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind, is the condition of the normal man."²⁴² The existential trauma of the disunitary self is viscerally asserted within the text: "Bodies half dead; genitals disassociated from heart; heart severed from head; head disassociated from genitals. Without inner unity...man is cut off from his own mind, cut off equally from his own body – a half crazed creature in a mad world."²⁴³

In his analysis of post-war alienation within the West, Laing drew upon the work of Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse has endured in critical thought, yet he is still a marginal figure compared to his peers in the Frankfurt School, who are still prominent in critical theory; namely Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno. Crucially, his work was of huge importance in providing theoretical support to the concept of the alienated individual in Western society in the Sixties, with Douglas

²⁴⁰ Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, p. 11.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Kellner describing him as “one of the most influential thinkers of his epoch.”²⁴⁴ Marcuse’s most influential work, *One Dimensional Man* (1964)²⁴⁵, provides the most devastating critique of the alienated nature of the self to emerge from this era. Somewhat more pessimistic than his earlier, also very important work *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Investigation into Freud* (1955),²⁴⁶ *One Dimensional Man* outlines a society in which all opposition is subsumed within the totalising ideology of advanced capitalism and its uncanny ability to cancel the dialectic. There is an implicit repression of all values, aspirations, and ideals, which do not conform to the opportunities offered by the schematic pattern of the ‘one dimensional model’. The private space of the individual – supposedly a position of possible resistance and relative autonomy - is subsumed within the one-dimensional form, that reductively offers the only possibilities in relation to the production of subjectivity, reducing man to a functionality in an operationally determined ontology of being; a mere cog in the machine.

The alienation of the self is wrought by the bureaucratic, rationalised society, which subsumes all in its mechanistic transubstantiation. With Marcuse, as with Laing, we see the idealisation of the inner, psychical life: “The idea of ‘inner freedom’ here has its reality: it designates the private space in which man may become and remain ‘himself.’ Today this private space has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality.”²⁴⁷ Essentially, “the loss of this dimension...is the ideological counterpart to the very material process in which advanced industrial society silences and reconciles the opposition...The subject

²⁴⁴ Douglas Kellner, preface to Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (London: Routledge, 1998).

²⁴⁵ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*.

²⁴⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation*.

²⁴⁷ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p. 12.

which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence. There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere and in all forms.²⁴⁸

As with Laing, Marcuse is grounded in the phenomenological tradition; a marked contrast to the rationalistic, positivist approach of mainstream thought in America, as William Barrett highlights: “Anglo-American philosophy is dominated by an altogether different and alien mode of thought – variously called analytic philosophy, Logical Positivism, or sometimes merely ‘scientific philosophy’.”²⁴⁹ As stated, this outlook was sternly rejected by the counterculture, and Marcuse’s evocation of an unrepressed libidinal Eros channelled not into labour - as in traditional Marxist approaches - but art and play, was immensely influential. Marcuse argues that there is a ‘repressive sublimation’, in which libidinal potentiality is lost through the escapisms of mass culture and entertainment.

Eric Fromm, who belonged to the same circle as the existential theologian Martin Buber, was also a profound influence upon Laing. In his work *The Sane Society*, Fromm diagnosed Western society as suffering from the very term “the pathology of normalcy,”²⁵⁰ in which the “*socially patterned defect*”²⁵¹ is insidiously reinforced. Again, the stifled authenticity is asserted in the text:

Today we come across a person who acts and feels like an automaton: who never experiences anything which is really his: who experiences himself entirely as the person he thinks he is supposed to be: whose artificial smile has replaced genuine laughter: whose meaningless

²⁴⁸ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p. 13.

²⁴⁹ William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1990), p. 21.

²⁵⁰ Eric Fromm, *The Sane Society* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 12.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

chatter has replaced communicative speech: whose dulled despair has taken the place of genuine pain.²⁵²

Laing echoes this sentiment in *The Divided Self* by stating how “in the ‘normal’ person a good number of his actions may be virtually mechanical.”²⁵³ This abstraction results in a reduction of the potential for agency, with Fromm arguing that “*man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished ‘thing’, dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance.*”²⁵⁴ In the words of Fromm: “*Things have no self and men who have become things can have no self.*”²⁵⁵

Fromm was deeply sceptical of conventional forms of psychiatry, and can be considered in many ways to be a forerunner of Laing and the radical psychoanalysts of the Sixties. For Laing, most conventional models of psychiatric practice were nothing more than facilitators towards the state of alienation that was considered ‘normality’. His approach was founded in part upon an overt reaction to the traditional models of psychotherapeutic and psychiatric practice prevalent in the West, as importantly, the utilisation of psychoanalysis for the transformation of subjectivity was not only used by theorists important to the counterculture, but also by those who would legitimise and strengthen the existing social order itself. Put to such uses, “an orthodox Freud seemed to authorize the ego psychologists’ adaptation to reality: to American world hegemony, to the

²⁵² Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 16.

²⁵³ Laing, *The Divided Self*, p. 95.

²⁵⁴ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 121.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

modern organization of the sciences, and to the cold war welfare state,”²⁵⁶ as Eli Zaretsky describes. The most obvious target was the school of ‘Ego Psychology’, whose most prominent advocates included Erik Erikson and Margaret Mahler. Turkle writes on the mainstream use of psychoanalysis in the US:

American psychoanalytic ego psychology, directed toward an active adaptation of the patient to reality, toward what came to be called “coping,” brought Freudianism in line with American beliefs about the virtue and necessity of an optimistic approach...It was able to assuage fears of being different or of being unsusceptible to “reform,” and it promised that self-improvement was possible without calling society into question.²⁵⁷

Laing was responsible for publishing in Britain the English translation of Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civillisation*²⁵⁸ - which he also reviewed, showering praise upon the work.²⁵⁹ In his foreword to the book, David Cooper, a particularly influential radical psychiatrist and colleague of Laing, wrote of mainstream psychotherapeutic practice thus:

²⁵⁶ Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), p. 308.

²⁵⁷ Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Jacques Lacan and Freud’s French Revolution* (London: Burnett Books, 1979), p. 8.

²⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civillisation* (London: Routledge, 2001).

²⁵⁹ Laing was responsible for bringing Foucault to the attention of the British intelligentsia, yet not the Americans however, as Pantheon had already published an abridged edition of *Madness and Civilisation*. In Laing’s own words: “in my capacity as editor of the ‘World of Man’ series for Tavistock, I published Foucault in English for the first time, which was his history of madness and civilization. I don’t know whether I would say it was a great book but it was one of the books that I would consider to be a really major book. His name was totally unknown in English. I wondered if Tavistock would be able to get it but anyway they did” (Laing, quoted in Mullan, *Mad to Be Normal*, p. 204). Laing was very much an admirer of Foucault, and “wept openly at the news of his death” (Daniel Burston, “R.D. Laing and the Politics of Diagnosis”). Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation* was very influential to the Sixties social critique of power-institutions that designated the terms ‘madness’ and ‘sanity’. Other important books included Thomas Szasz’s 1967 work *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct* (London: Harper and Row, 1984) and Ervin Goffman’s 1961 work *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

We find that some people by this technique manage at quite a pace to achieve a workable conformism – defined as normality, maturity, developedness. The truer goal, however, must be in terms of a recognizable synthesis of this field of social practicality with its secret antithesis – the autonomous assertion of a pure, spontaneous Self. This means that I break through a certain delimitation of what I am towards a version of myself hinted at, and just possibly true.²⁶⁰

The ‘Self’ that Cooper speaks of is undoubtedly the self of existentialism, the root of all that is ‘authentic’, as opposed to the stifling conditionalities imposed by mainstream society; a distinct evocation of the alienation/authenticity structure of feeling.

As a result of the projected socio-cultural condition of widespread alienation that conformist ‘normality’ was thought to entail, “counterculture youth undertook of necessity a turn to the self as the only remaining source of meaning and significance. One major counterculture orientation thus found expression in a search for ways of life that nurture the authentic self.”²⁶¹ Brick describes how “the obsolescence of an old social order rendered all established roles radically artificial – things a vital self might shed.”²⁶² This emphasis upon the aspiration to find a ‘true self’ underneath the stifling conditionalities of post-war US capitalism, was, I believe, an overriding thematic concern of the Sixties counterculture. In the words of Michals:

The 1960s were awash with countercultural strategies for social revolution, many of which built upon varying notions of ‘consciousness’ as the key to overhauling society. For these groups, consciousness

²⁶⁰ David Cooper, introduction to Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p. ix.

²⁶¹ Suha Taji-Farouki, *Beshara and Ibn 'Arabi: A Movement of Sufi Spirituality in the Modern World* (Oxford: Anqua Publishing, 2009), p. 3.

²⁶² Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. 73.

referred to adopting a new perception, becoming aware of the ways in which the existing patriarchal, capitalist order co-opted the individual's core human existence and identity.²⁶³

Yet how could this transfer into socio-political change? This concern is linked to the search for authenticity that is part of a 'political personalism' that I argue in many ways defined the mode of active engagement in the politics of consciousness of the Sixties. It is this concern, tracing the specific lineage of which Anger is part of - that of the 'visionary tract' - which forms the subject of the next chapter.

²⁶³ Debra Michals, "From Consciousness Expansion to Consciousness Raising: Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self," in. *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s & 1970s*, eds. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 42.

2

Liberation and Film

Something essential is taking place, something of extreme seriousness: the tracking down of all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday lives.²⁶⁴

- Michel Foucault

The *first* revolution (but not of course the last) is in yr own head.²⁶⁵

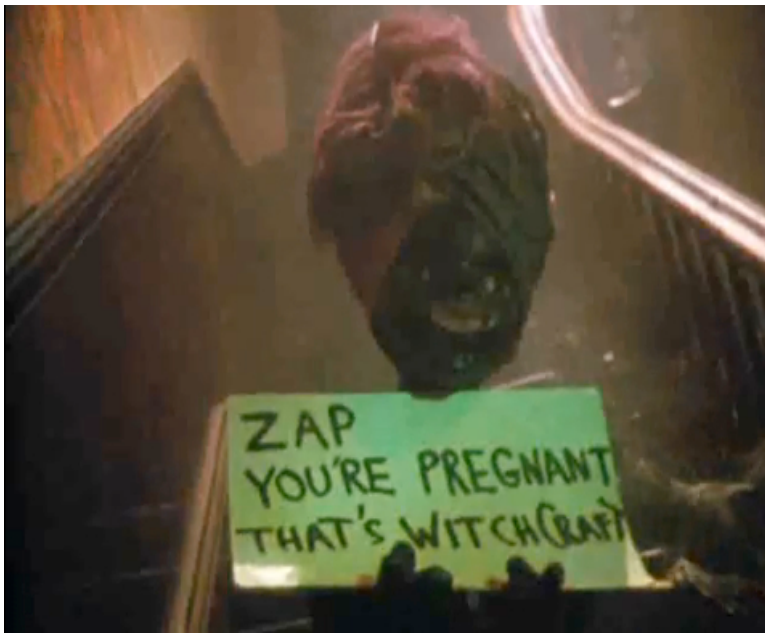
- Tuli Kupferberg

Towards the end of Anger's 1969 work *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, a voodoo doll rolls down a flight of stairs to present a sign with the words "ZAP – YOU'RE PREGNANT, THAT'S WITCHCRAFT." This rather strange sequence – made possible through the use of stop-start animation – is, according to the filmmaker, rather dismissively, "just one of my little jokes."²⁶⁶ However, I believe it is, in fact, an explicit verbal statement of the 'alterative' intent of Anger's craft; a quality that I argue forms the very essence of his entire practice. This alterative intent, as read in relation to wider socio-political issues, is the subject of this chapter.

²⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Continuum, 2008) p. xvi.

²⁶⁵ Tuli Kupferberg, quoted in Farrell, *The Spirit of The Sixties*, p. 208.

²⁶⁶ Kenneth Anger, director's commentary to *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, directed by Kenneth Anger (1969; *Kenneth Anger's Magick Lantern Cycle*, British Film Institute, 2009), DVD.



Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969)

Anger has a particular interest in forms of media that are implicitly concerned with generating high degrees of spectator response. During an interview with Kate Haug, Anger recounted his detailed studies of “Second World War propaganda.”²⁶⁷ Landis’ biography of the filmmaker is strewn with references to how Anger - due to his close relationship with the legendary Professor Kinsey - would pour over thousands upon thousands of pornographic and erotic images that Kinsey had accumulated over the numerous years of his research into sexuality.²⁶⁸ The fact that he has such an interest in two forms of media that are implicitly concerned with spectatorial response - in this case, propaganda and eroticism - is, I believe, explicit testimony towards his intent.

As stated, I argue that Anger’s aspiration to render a transformative aesthetic can be understood as a distinct aspect of the American post-war counterculture that

²⁶⁷ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Kate Haug, “An Interview With Kenneth Anger,” *Wide Angle* 18, no. 4 (October 1996): p. 78.

²⁶⁸ Please see Landis, *Anger*.

was concerned with the transformation of the conditional self. Within this chapter, I proceed to outline the manner in which the consideration of authenticity was part of a shift that occurred within the US during the Sixties towards a form of political personalism, and that Anger's spiritually inflected aesthetic practice is a utopian expression of the use of art as a tool in such liberation. I trace Anger's relation to what I see as a spiritually inflected romantic-anarchist strain of the avant-garde, particularly that of the Beat Movement, of which Anger was a close associate.

(2.1) Political Personalism

I argue the Sixties politics of the self is foundationally constituted in what may be considered to be a modernist view of the struggle for selfhood against a resistant, constrictive world. This question had distinct implications for the progressive movements of the Sixties that sought to emancipate the subject from constraints – both material and psychical – with regard to the proposed methodologies of change. Morgan outlines “the fundamental dilemmas that confronted all movements of the 1960s: how to effect change on a national scale through movements founded on personal relationships and grassroots organizing, a utopian vision, and personal spontaneity...[and] what to do when confronted by a repressive state.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, pp. 8-9.

Farrell states: "One of the most important developments of the American 1960s was the understanding that the personal is political...everyday life was an arena of politics and that everyday choices had political implications."²⁷⁰ The realm of political consequence expanded beyond what were considered the traditional boundaries of such action, to encompass what was commonly seen as 'the personal'. This emerged, above all, from a consideration of - and emphasis upon - the political content of subjectivity itself; a trend that emerged primarily from the women's liberation movement, in which the term 'the personal is political' was a central refrain. Fundamentally, "no barriers had been erected between the personal liberation of freeing the mind and a radicalized activist engagement that looked forward to a broad social liberation,"²⁷¹ as Wilson argues. I believe Anger's aspiration to prompt the cinematic spectator towards a form of 'psychical liberation' should be read alongside such concerns.

The proposition that to change one's own life is a political act in itself, had far reaching consequences for the approach of active political engagement. Such a development came in part from an increasing "belief in a community based, egalitarian democracy; a sharp personal awareness of social ills; and a feeling of confidence that something could be done."²⁷² Crucially, Purcell defines this as "communitarian subjectivism" - an approach which ultimately was based upon "a faith that communities could draw on the creativity of their members to collectively reconceive and thereby transform their world...The distinctive synthesis of the sixties united collectivism with subjectivism and cohesion with

²⁷⁰ Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 28.

²⁷¹ Andrew Wilson, "Spontaneous Underground: An Introduction to the London Psychedelic Scenes, 1965-68," in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, p. 72.

²⁷² Morgan, *The Sixties Experience*, p. 19.

transformation.”²⁷³ What remained essential to this form of political personalism however, was the ideal of the pursuit of authenticity. As Morgan argues: “In contrast to the more compartmentalized, abstract mainstream process, political action was bound up with personal authenticity.”²⁷⁴ That fundamentally, “the idea of alienation remained current in the critique of ‘dissociation’ – a disabling, demoralizing distance between self and others, between actions and consequences – that became one of the watchwords of intellectual discussion throughout the decade.”²⁷⁵

Whilst the question of alienation from one’s own self and alienation from others are different philosophical problems, the overwhelming countercultural impetus of the era was concerned with the exploration of the question of alienation and authenticity, despite differences regarding what exactly this question entailed. Arthur describes how “directives aimed at the discovery of new, non-alienated modes of conducting everyday life...were issued in a barrage of ethical, political, and aesthetic versions from practically every station on the compass of the opposition.”²⁷⁶ What remains central is a need for consciousness alteration - a profound change in subjectivity from ‘serial and standardised’ forms - as either a prerequisite for change, or, as in the romantic anarchist train which I trace shortly, a qualifier for change in and of itself. This, I argue, is the essential nature of the Sixties politics of consciousness. Whilst the theoretical leanings of the various progressive approaches vary considerably, along with their proposed instrumental procedures for implementing change, the evocation of alienation and the need for

²⁷³ Edward Purcell, “Social Thought,” *American Quarterly* 35 (Spring-Summer 1985): pp. 86-87, quoted in Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 204.

²⁷⁴ Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, p. 19.

²⁷⁵ Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. 17.

²⁷⁶ Arthur, *A Line of Sight*, p. 1.

the actualisation of a form of subjective authenticity remains consistent. In an alienated world, an emphasis upon the self as the ontological ground of being and its explicit radiance in relation to its surroundings remains crucial; that fundamentally, "the meaningfulness and authenticity of the subject's relation to self and world is primary."²⁷⁷

With the emphasis upon 'personal authenticity' being central to the issue of subjectivity within the American counterculture, the question of the psyche in relation to externality inevitably rises. Roszack summarises what I believe is a central epistemological inquiry, which in many ways defines fundamental issues surrounding the countercultural movements of the Sixties: "Is the psyche, as Marx would have it, a reflection of 'the mode of production of material life'? Or is the social structure, as Freud argued, a reflection of our psychic contents?"²⁷⁸ He further elucidates: "Philosophically, the issue raises the very question of the locus of reality, the direction in which metaphor points. Politically, it poses the question of how our liberation is to be achieved...By social or psychic revolution? The convenient answer is *both*. But with which do we start? Which is the more 'real?'"²⁷⁹

The issue is ultimately a metaphysical question - one that has plagued Western thought for centuries - that of the inner/outer dualism, and indeed if there is such a concept, which postmodernism has been so vocal in attempting to deconstruct. I am certainly not offering a philosophical speculation regarding the question itself, but what concerns me is the fact that this struggle between differing approaches

²⁷⁷ DeKoven, *Utopia Limited*, p. 190.

²⁷⁸ Roszack, *The Making of a Counterculture*, p. 85.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

towards change – relative to the inner/outer dualism – is, I believe, in itself representative of the residues of modernism that permeated the American counterculture movements of the Sixties. In the words of Charles Guignon: “The sharp distinction between *inner* and *outer* that enables us to think of the true self as something that lies within while the false self is something outer...was not formulated until a little over two hundred years ago.”²⁸⁰ He describes how “this newly defined *self* naturally makes a sharp distinction between the features that are part of its worldly existence and what is really deep within. The modern outlook brings to realization a split between the *Real Me* – the true inner self – and the *persona*...that one puts on for the external world.”²⁸¹ In essence, “the idea of authenticity presupposes a conception of a true self lying within the individual, a self that contains resources of understanding and purpose that are worth accessing and raising to expression.”²⁸²

It is important to acknowledge that, as well as there being divisions within the American counterculture between the prescribed approaches to change, there were also attempts to integrate them. David Cooper - as stated, a prominent British radical psychiatrist and colleague of Laing - tackled this question when he argued that what was needed was an approach that “aimed ultimately at creating a revolutionary consciousness fusing ideology and action in a way that relied on an understanding of the necessary dynamic existing between the actions of inner and outer space.”²⁸³ Cooper states:

²⁸⁰ Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 12.

²⁸¹ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p. 35.

²⁸² Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p. 12.

²⁸³ Wilson, “Spontaneous Underground,” p. 72.

It seems to me that a cardinal failure of past revolutions has been the dissociation of liberation on the mass social level, i.e. liberation of whole classes in economic and political terms, and liberation on the level of the individual and the concrete groups in which he is directly engaged. If we are to talk of revolution today our talk will be meaningless unless we effect some union between the macro-social and micro-social, and between 'inner reality' and 'outer reality'.²⁸⁴

Farrell describes how “personalist politics had always challenged the definitions that allowed such distinctions. Countercultural personalists considered consciousness an integral part of any political culture...They knew that ways of seeing were more important in the long run than the more prominent political issues of national campaigns.”²⁸⁵ Thus, rather than purely an emphasis upon socio-structural change - as in traditional, or ‘vulgar’ Marxist ideology - there became an emphasis on the political content of subjectivity; that fundamentally, “the boundaries between private/personal life and public/political life are artificial,”²⁸⁶ as Michals argues. The feminist refrain of ‘the personal is political’, came to emphasise the transformed, actualised, and crucially, authentic subject. The modalities of consciousness were taken to be a political question, and any wider socio-political change must come as a result of subjective psychological liberation – either as a prerequisite to wider action, or as an end in itself. Following this thesis, Roszack states: “From this viewpoint it becomes abundantly clear that the revolution which will free us from alienation must be primarily therapeutic in character and not merely institutional.”²⁸⁷ In wider cultural terms, this was expressed in the Sixties phrase, “Free your mind and the rest will

²⁸⁴ David Cooper, introduction to *The Dialectics of Liberation*, ed. David Cooper (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 9-10.

²⁸⁵ Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 223.

²⁸⁶ Michals, “Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self,” p. 48.

²⁸⁷ Roszack, *The Making of a Counterculture*, p. 97.

follow.”²⁸⁸ Walter Benjamin – also of Frankfurt school, along with Marcuse - saw that “no revolution could succeed unless it also transformed the inner realm of thought – the meaning of perception, the relationship of the senses to the physical world.”²⁸⁹

(2.2) The New Left and the Politics of Consciousness

This climate was also influenced by shifts in the nature of the organised Left within the US. In the early Fifties, the American Left was subjected to a spate of anti-union legislation and suppressed by the Cold War witch-hunts of McCarthyism. Furthermore, Nikita Khrushchev’s address to the Russian Twentieth Party Congress on February 25, 1956, entitled “On The Personality Cult and Its Consequences,”²⁹⁰ concerning the denunciation of the horrors of Stalinism, fundamentally damaged the sense of identity of the Left in the West. This was compounded by the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, which further exacerbated the antipathy toward the monolithic USSR. The rejection of the USSR’s foundational importance as an ideological bedrock resulted in something of a crisis for the Left, leading in part to a questioning of the validity of classic vulgar Marxist approaches towards emancipation. Due to the shifting nature of mass consumer culture, such traditional Marxist analysis was increasingly seen as outmoded. For the New Left, “socialism had to be radically reconceived if it was to challenge the new forms of post-war corporate and consumer capitalism...This reconception had

²⁸⁸ Braunstein and Doyle, “Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s,” p. 15.

²⁸⁹ Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 16.

²⁹⁰ Nikita Khrushchev, “On the Personality Cult and Its Consequences”(Moscow, Twentieth Party Congress, February 25, 1956), *The Guardian* (26 April 2007): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2007/apr/26/greatspeeches1>.

to be based on the ²⁹¹development of a rigorous intellectual investigation into contemporary society.”²⁹² In the words of Farrell:

The Old Left built on the rock of scientific materialism...Because of the Depression, the Old Left focused on economic issues; post-war affluence permitted a personalist concern for cultural issues and for quality of life. While the Old Left organized for collective action, personalists often dis-organized for voluntary action. The socialist tradition emphasized national ownership and administrative centralization, but the personalists preferred decentralized sharing.²⁹³

This form of political engagement was considered by Guattari to be a form of ‘molecular revolution’ – a form of micro-politics. Guattari wrote of the need for change to occur initially on a subjective level, ultimately resulting in an engaged social practice:

This is where the molecular revolution begins: you are a fascist or a revolutionary with yourself first, on the level of your superego, in relation to your body, your emotions, your husband, your wife, your children, your colleagues, in your relation to justice and the State. There is a continuum between these ‘prepersonal’ domains and the infrastructures and strata that ‘exceed’ the individual.

This shift away from instrumental approaches to change, and the move towards the consideration of subjectivity as the locus of political action, resulted in a new mode of organisational structure within the movements advocating progressive social change. Reekie describes how “the movement reacted against the hierarchical party discipline, dogmatism and anti-intellectualism of the established

²⁹¹ Félix Guattari, *Soft-Subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977-1985*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Chet Wiener and Emily Wittman (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), p. 31.

²⁹² Reekie, *Subversion*, pp. 137–138.

²⁹³ Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 9.

left by attempting to develop projects which were popular, non-hierarchical, heterogeneous in membership and perspective, and integrated in theory and practice.”²⁹⁴ The seminal “Port Huron Statement of 1962,” encapsulates this turn towards a politics of personalism (unfortunately still crouched in phallogentric language):

We regard *men* as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love. In affirming these principles we are aware of countering perhaps the dominant conceptions of man in the twentieth century: that he is a thing to be manipulated, and that he is inherently incapable of directing his own affairs. We oppose the depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things.²⁹⁵

Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” (1849) was another “privileged text in the political philosophy of Martin Luther King as well as early factions of the New Left.”²⁹⁶ This work revels in the spirit of the politics of personalism. Thoreau’s states: “It is, after all, with men not parchment that I quarrel,” and freedom is “the obligation...to do at any time what I think right.”²⁹⁷ Barry Hankins describes how Thoreau “believed that the hectic pace of nineteenth-century America resulted in most people living ‘lives of quiet desperation’...The primary goal of life was to cultivate the inner person, but the quest for material possessions interfered with this effort.”²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ Reekie, *Subversion*, p. 138.

²⁹⁵ “The Port Huron Statement,” in *Takin’ it to the Streets: A Sixties Reader*, eds. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 54.

²⁹⁶ Arthur, *Line of Sight*, p. 16.

²⁹⁷ Henri David Thoreau, “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,” *Project Gutenberg* (12th June 2004): <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/71/71.txt>.

²⁹⁸ Barry Hankins, *The Second Great Awakening and the Transcendentalists* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004), p. 32.

The Transcendentalist movement – of which Thoreau was one of the most important members - is argued by a number of historians to have played a pivotal role not only in the development of the American countercultural movement, but also in the distinct aesthetic shifts that occurred post-war within the US. Gair describes how the movement's legacy "is apparent in instances as diverse as Beat fiction and poetry, Abstract Expressionist art and in the communes of the 1960s."²⁹⁹ Donald N. Koster, in his history of the movement, defines Transcendentalism as "a warm and intuitional religious, aesthetic, philosophical and ethical movement – the American tributary of European Romanticism – a theoretical and practical way of life and a literary expression within the tradition of Idealism – a new humanism based upon ancient classical or Neo-Platonic supernaturalism and colored by Oriental mysticism."³⁰⁰

Whilst he disassociates the New Left from the counterculture itself, Farrell has described the New Left and the counterculture as "the ying and yang of sixties radicalism, organically intertwined, two movements of the same Movement."³⁰¹ In the words of Ellwood:

One of the ways in which the New Left was different from the left of the 1930s was in its concern with consciousness. It looked at oppression not only in economic and political terms but how people thought about themselves. A concern with feeling states affected many aspects of the New Left, often making problematic, for example, the boundaries between 'politicos' and 'hippies'.

²⁹⁹ Gair, *The American Counterculture*, p. 11.

³⁰⁰ Donald N. Koster, *Transcendentalism in America* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975): p. 2, quoted in Hankins, *The Second Great Awakening*, pp. 25-26.

³⁰¹ Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 223.

Contrary to what Farrell argues however, it appears the approaches towards change that were advocated within the Sixties, remained to an extent divided. The Dialectics of Liberation Conference, held in London in 1968, demonstrated the split in approaches more symbolically than any example the present author can offer. Wilson describes how the Conference

underlies the extent to which the political thrust of the underground in London, as elsewhere, often appears to be split in two – on the one hand soft mystical voyagers to the limits of consciousness (‘cosmonauts of inner space’, to use Trocchi’s potent phrase) and on the other, a hard political activism typified by the rise of the New Left that was to become even more conspicuous through the events of 1968.³⁰²

In 1967, Anger moved to London,³⁰³ the year in which the Conference took place at The Roundhouse in Chalk Farm, London - from 15th to the 30th of July. Those who presented at the Conference included Cooper, Laing, Gregory Bateson, Ross Speck, Stokely Carmichael, John Gerassi, Herbert Marcuse, Jules Henry, Paul Sweezy, Allen Ginsberg, Julian Beck, Paul Goodman, Simon Vinkenoog, Gajo Petrovic, Igor Hajeck, Lucien Goldman, Francis Huxley and Thich Nhat Hahn. This – notably all male - collection of academics, economists, psychiatrists, political activists, literary critics, anthropologists, sociologists, theatre directors, and Buddhist monks converged on London in an attempt to debate – to paraphrase Lenin – ‘what is to be done?’ In Laing’s own words, the Conference “arose out of the turmoil of the ‘60s and my immediate network of that time. The intellectual context went from a sort of parallel meta-Marxism of latter-day Sartre and the intellectual sophistication of the *New Left Review* type of mind, the Batesonian communication research and the

³⁰² Wilson, “Spontaneous Underground,” p. 70.

³⁰³ Landis, *Anger*, p. 162.

world of Kingsley Hall.”³⁰⁴ Collier elucidates this particular stand of progressive politics:

This style of leftism reflected the fact that it was not these struggles which gave rise to the resurgence of the left at that time, but rather student revolts, black power movements, women’s and gay liberation movements, the ‘counter-culture’ based on rock music, mind-expanding drugs and relatively free sexual mores etc. These movements were largely of people who were oppressed by the ideological institutions of capitalist society (the education system, the patriarchal family, racial discrimination, police interference in private life, etc.) rather than directly economically exploited. It was against these intermediate micro-social structures that the immediate revolt of the new left was directed.³⁰⁵

The Conference itself was extremely tempestuous, with many of the speakers virulently criticising each other’s stances - importantly, over the prescribed approaches toward implementing change. In the case of Laing and Stokely Carmichael, the division was emblematic of the divide. Mullan describes how “Carmichael and Laing disagreed about almost everything but particularly with what Laing saw as Carmichael’s superficial rejection of the individual as a focus of analysis and, by implication, his reification of the term ‘system’.”³⁰⁶ During his speech, Carmichael stated: “I’ve been turning on since I was thirteen, and I still haven’t found my way because the structure is still oppressing me. What’s happening now is that the people who say they’re dropping out are turning on, and expecting that to be their excuse or their escape out of society. That is absurd at best, ludicrous at least.”³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Mullan, *Mad to Be Normal*, p. 218.

³⁰⁵ Collier, *R.D. Laing*, pp. 167-168.

³⁰⁶ Mullan, *R.D. Laing*, p. 108.

³⁰⁷ Stokely Carmichael, quoted in John Clay, *R.D. Laing: A Divided Self* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), p. 144.

Gair highlights the nature of the interplay between - what may be loosely designated - the two approaches:

Many of the leaders of the New Left in the 1960's seem to have had little interest in the more obscure and experimental texts that emerged at the time and were concerned that searches for individual enlightenment – through drugs or meditation – were counterproductive in the drive for social transformation. This does not mean, however, that the political 'movement' and the counterculture were entirely discreet...There are, however, also dangers in identifying the counterculture too closely with the New Left. While the two were indubitably united first through civil rights and later in anti-Vietnam War protests, many within the hippie community saw politics as a 'drag' while those in the movement appeared to be both fascinated and appalled by the activities of the Diggers, Yippies and other groups who utilised performance and spectacle to draw attention to their demands.³⁰⁸

The more overt political movements retained marked contrasts with what Martin defines as the 'romantic, anarchist' strain of radical liberation, to which Laing, Ginsberg and most specifically, Anger, were associated.

(2.3) Anger's 'Romantic Anarchism'

This particular strain of political personalism was grounded in a form of romantic utopianism. 'Romantic anarchism', as defined by Martin, is key to my argument, in that this particular strain of revolutionary thought offered

a generalised condemnation of Western industrial society which sometimes had religious or mystical overtones...These anarchists tended to concentrate on the liberation of the repressed psychology

³⁰⁸ Gair, *The Making of a Counterculture*, p. 8.

produced by civilisation and its discontents, or on the achievement of that liberation through sex, art and aesthetic education...The romantic anarchism of the Left...has always included an interest in religions with a weak component of rationalism.³⁰⁹

Martin describes how “there has been the attraction of experiential cults from eastern religions, and of Zen, not to mention the various mind-expanding drugs which have simultaneously served to release weary souls from the chains of everyday technical rationality and the bondage of industrial society.”³¹⁰ For this romantic anarchist strain, the transformation of individual consciousness was a qualifier for political change in and of itself. This strain was concerned most specifically with the ‘disease of normality’, the Western malaise, or “the liberation of the repressed psychology”³¹¹ as Martin defines it. As previously stated, Anger is self described anarchist, and his personal ideology resonates completely with the romantic vision of this particular strain of the Sixties counterculture, in which, “not since early nineteenth-century Romanticism had there been such a strange mix of revolutionary politics with ecstatic nature-worship and sex-charged self-transformation”³¹²

Crucially, Laing was in many ways the principal theorist for the romantic-anarchist element within the counterculture. In the words of Martin: “Laing must be accounted one of the main contributors to the theoretical and rhetorical armoury of the contemporary Left. By the contemporary left is meant that soft variant of

³⁰⁹ Martin, “R.D. Laing,” pp. 181-182. Martin’s diagnosis of religions with a ‘weak component of rationalism’ appears to spring from his affinity with Catholicism, which is essentially disclosed within the essay.

³¹⁰ Martin, “R.D. Laing,” pp. 181-182.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Camille Da Glia, “Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 10.3 (Winter 2003), p. 58.

the utopian urge which has jettisoned the Marx of *Capital* for the spiritual exploration of alienation.”³¹³ While Laing was read widely in New-Left circles, his latter work, which drew upon more spiritual sources - including a variety of Buddhist texts and the Hindu *Upanishads* - left some a little cold, with Sedgwick lambasting him for his turn towards Eastern doctrine.³¹⁴ Yet, to the mystical strand of the counterculture, immersed in LSD and Eastern forms of spiritual practice, he retained his guru-like status.³¹⁵ Laing, whom I deem to be the most influential theorist toward the Sixties structure of feeling surrounding the consideration of consciousness, was a direct associate of the Beats, and was seen to be, in Melechi words, “the shaman to the underground.”³¹⁶ In relation to Anger, Laing’s writings articulate facets of his practice in relation to far wider social discourses of the era. This is why I believe it has been critically important to evaluate Laing’s influence upon the Sixties structure of feeling in which Anger was implicitly situated. He was the theoretician par excellence of the Beat generation - the scholar who offered them the most incisive lines of thought on the nature of subjectivity in Sixties America.³¹⁷

³¹³ Martin, “R.D Laing,” p. 179.

³¹⁴ Please see Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, pp 113-114.

³¹⁵ Laing remained something of a sacred cow for the Left for many years however, up until the mid 1980s, when his influence fell markedly.

³¹⁶ Antonio Melechi, “Drugs of Liberation: For Psychiatry to Psychedelia,” in *Psychedelia Britannica: Hallucinogenic Drugs in Britain*, ed. Antonio Melechi (London: Turnaround, 1997), p. 45.

³¹⁷ Marianne DeKoven, who has also written about Laing from a personal perspective, describes Laing’s *The Politics of Experience* as “one of the few most important sixties radical countercultural texts,” and that

when it appeared, PE seemed, at least to me and the people I knew in the university New Left and counterculture, to be one of the few most important and powerful statements to appear, not so much of what we knew or already knew or believed, or what would be easy to embrace, but rather of what we must, of enormous difficulty and painful self-reconstitution, come to understand and reshape our lives and world. For me, in any case, Laing, more than anyone else I had read, spoke through his passionate, poetical writing to my sense of what was wrong with the world and what must be done to right it. (DeKoven, *Utopia Limited*, pp. 201 – 209)

For Charles Reich, “the new consciousness is also in the process of revolutionizing the structure of our society. It does not accomplish this by direct political means, but by changing culture and the quality of individual lives, which in turn change politics and, ultimately, structure.”³¹⁸ This particular methodology has been described by R.N. Berki as the “religious strain” of radical thought, and as such has been referred to, within progressive politics, as “the crisis of radicalism.”³¹⁹ For the overtly “religious model,” as suggested by Berki, “their preoccupation tends to be with the ‘inner’ as opposed to the ‘outer’, with the salvation of the individual as opposed to the restructuring of society.”³²⁰ Much like Berki, Ellwood has identified a strain within Sixties radicalism that calls upon religious convictions in relation to politics; yet, like myself, he believes “the religious and political sides of the Sixties should not be set against each other so much as seen as bands in a single spectrum. Both are spiritual in that they touch on values of ultimate significance. What they have in common is much more important than what sets them apart.”³²¹ Within this model, “an emphasis on ‘open heart’ and ‘feeling’, that is, the self and its fulfillment, is very much at the centre of the discussion of commitment, whether to personal or social goals.”³²² For this particular strain of radicalism, “building the good society is not primarily a social, but a psychic task,” in the words of Roszack.³²³

³¹⁸ Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1972) p. 24.

³¹⁹ R.N. Berki, “Marcuse and the Crisis of the New Radicalism: From Politics to Religion?” in *The Frankfurt School, Vol. 6: Critical Assessments*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 157.

³²⁰ Berki, “Marcuse and the Crisis of the New Radicalism,” p. 160.

³²¹ Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, p. 9.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Roszack, *The Making of a Counterculture*, p. 49.

Crowley is directly related to romantic anarchist thought, and can, in many ways, be considered a 'proto-hippy'. One of his primary influences was François Rabelais, from whom he adopted the maxim "Do What Thou Wilt," in his own evocation of the utopian vision. Rabelais, in his 1532 work, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*,³²⁴ wrote of an idealised, utopian society:

All their life was spent not in laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure. They rose out of their beds when they thought good; they did eat, drink, labour, sleep, when they had a mind to it and were disposed for it. None did awake them, none did offer to constrain them to eat, drink, nor to do any other thing; for so had Gargantua established it. In all their rule and strictest tie of their order there was but this one clause to be observed; Do What Thou Wilt.³²⁵

Crowley's paraphrasing of Rabelais' maxim became "Do What Thou Wilt shall be the Whole of the Law"³²⁶- a statement which became something of a rallying call for the children of the Sixties counterculture. Such an affirmation of freedom is not a licence to indulge every whim however, but a complex moral and behavioural system of autonomous, socio-anarchistic metaphysical thought. In direct relation to Crowley's influence upon the wider social currents of the Sixties counterculture, it is perhaps best if I include a direct reference to Crowley's work in order that the reader may draw their own conclusions. Crowley's philosophy can be neatly summarised in the following text, which is described as *Liber Oz*:

³²⁴ Master François Rabelais, *Five Books of the Lives, Heroic Deeds and Sayings of Gargantua and His Son Pantagruel*, trans. Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty and Peter Antony Monteux (Forgotten Books, 2008), p. 132.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Aleister Crowley, *The Book of the Law: 100th Anniversary Edition* (Boston: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2004), p. 13.

1. Man has the right to live by his own law-
to live in the way that he wills to do:
to work as he will:
to play as he will:
to rest as he will:
to die when and how he will.
2. Man has the right to eat what he will:
to drink what he will:
to dwell where he will:
to move as he will on the face of the earth.
3. Man has the right to think what he will:
to speak what he will:
to write what he will:
to draw, paint, carve, etch, mould, build as he will:
to dress as he will.
4. Man has the right to love as he will:-
"take your fill and will of love as ye will,
when, where, and with whom ye will." -AL. I. 51
5. Man has the right to kill those who would thwart these rights.
"the slaves shall serve." --AL. II. 58
"Love is the law, love under will." --AL. I. 57³²⁷

The tone of the work is very Nietzschean, but what is strikingly apparent is the manner in which such an advocate of freedom in all areas – not least of which was sex – could be such an iconic influence upon the Sixties counterculture. Indeed, despite Anger's reliance upon Crowley's ideology, his anarchist credentials are even more firmly expressed when he states: "I don't follow leaders, not even Crowley."³²⁸

³²⁷ Aleister Crowley, "Liber LXXVII (Liber Oz)," *Hermetic Library*, <http://hermetic.com/crowley/libers/lib77.html>.

³²⁸ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Michael O'Pray, BFI Audio Archive (17/01/1990), National Film Theatre, Southbank, London.

(2.4) Anger, the Beats, and Beatitude

The 'Beat movement' fundamentally embodied the romantic-anarchist subculture of the Sixties. It was, however, a larger social grouping than the mythos surrounding the iconic members of the Beat generation suggests. As Reekie describes, the archetypal Beat community was "composed of a cluster of bohemian poets, novelists and filmmakers who extravagantly fostered and sometimes denied their own mythology, but beat culture must also be understood as a broader youth subculture centred on New York and the West Coast from the late 1940s to the early 1960s."³²⁹ The Beat movement was integral to the cultural climate of the Sixties, and Anger, who was a close associate of many of the famous and iconic Beats, should, I argue, be considered alongside them. Anger was very close to Brion Gysin and William Burroughs, with Rayns describing how the latter "used stills from *Fireworks* to illustrate the first edition of his 1970 book *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz*."³³⁰ In the documentary film *Flicker* (2008), Anger states how he rarely shows his 'Lucifer' tattoo emblazoned upon his chest, but he "would gladly do so for Brion."³³¹ Along with the avant-garde, Anger shared with Gysin and Burroughs an obsession with mysticism and the occult; an interest that permeated the whole of the Beat community. Burroughs had long been interested in the occult, famously stating in his 1983 work *The Place of Dead Roads*: "In the magical universe there are no coincidences and there are no accidents. Nothing happens

³²⁹ Reekie, *Subversion*, p. 135.

³³⁰ Tony Rayns, "Inflammable Desires," in *Sight and Sound* (July 2009): p.36.

³³¹ Kenneth Anger in *Flicker*, directed by Nick Sheehan (2008; New York: Kino Lorber, Alive Mind Cinema) DVD.

unless someone wills it to happen.³³² Anger was also a particularly close friend of Beat poet Robert Duncan, who, like Anger, was influenced by hermetic magickal doctrines, and shared with him a concern with Queer issues and the avant-garde.

Paul Gallagher describes how Anger first encountered the Beats, when director and distributor Antony Balch attended a meeting in Paris of “Burroughs, Brion Gysin, Glaswegian Beat writer Alexander Trocchi and Kenneth Anger. It was a fortuitous meeting of like-minded artists.”³³³ Anger helped Balch with his cinema distribution, providing him with a copy of Todd Browning’s *Freaks* (1932), which was banned at that time in the UK, and in return, Balch screened Anger’s *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969). Balch collaborated with Burroughs firstly on *Towers Open Fire* (1963), a collection of Burroughs-filmed routines interspersed with Balch’s footage, which attempted to convey a disintegrating society, and subsequently on their most important work *The Cut-Ups* (1967); a seminal work based on Gyson’s method of the same name, which was adopted by Burroughs. In the words of Jack Sargeant, the piece “opens up the text for the reader, allowing languages and images to emerge from the juxtaposition of words, and to create a universe of possibilities. The cut-up texts also function as ‘magical’ texts, they attempted to expose the methodology of control and to destroy it.”³³⁴ Through disassociation and fragmentation, the film aims to liberate the viewer not only from the reception of a degree of orthodox syntax, but also the methodology of control formed by the linear construction of the communicative discourse of

³³² William Burroughs, *The Place of Dead Roads* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), quoted in John Lardas, *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 194.

³³³ Paul Gallagher, “William Burroughs and Antony Balch – ‘The Cut Ups,’” *Dangerous Minds* (12, 2010): http://www.dangerousminds.net/comments/william_burroughs_antony_balch_cut_ups/.

³³⁴ Jack Sargeant, *Naked Lens: Beat Cinema* (London: Creation Books, 1997) p. 172.

language itself. Through its attempt to undermine the self-conscious rational subject, the work is an excellent example of a form of aesthetic countercultural engagement in the politics of consciousness of the Sixties.

As to the climate of alienation engendered by conventional subjectivity, the Beats were integral to such cultural perceptions, both personally and aesthetically engaging with the intense youth dissatisfaction felt in many corners of American society. In the words of Lee Martin and Bruce Shlain: "The beats were pitchmen for another kind of consciousness. They encouraged the youth of America to take their first groping steps toward a psychological freedom from convention."³³⁵ The Beats were a fundamental influence upon the development of the political personalist approach within post-war US society. They "saw their personal lives in cultural terms, and they tried to shape the fate of American culture with the facts of their own poetic lines and lives."³³⁶ The anarchic freedom expressed by the Beat lifestyle was a direct influence on the more avowedly political New Left. Arthur describes how Tom Hayden, one of the founders of the central New Left organisations, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), "tried, with others in his circle, to infuse the SDS program for social change with Beat values."³³⁷

Despite their influence upon the New Left, the Beats remained stubbornly non-committed to practical solutions. For them, any political replacement of the social order would merely bring forth a new model of institutional repression. However, Burroughs – ever the comfortable outsider of the Beats - famously offered his own

³³⁵ Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD* (New York: Grove Press), p. 61.

³³⁶ Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 63.

³³⁷ Arthur, *Line of Sight*, p. 21.

opinion that “the people in power will not disappear voluntarily, giving flowers to the cops just isn't going to work. The establishment fosters this thinking; they like nothing better than love and nonviolence. The only way I like to see cops given flowers is in a flower pot from a high window.”³³⁸ The Beats were the most iconic representatives of a dissociative, intensely subjectivist stance. Allen Watts, at the ‘Houseboat Summit’ of 1967 - which brought him together with Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Timothy Leary - succinctly summarised the issue at hand when he opened the meeting by stating: “The whole problem is whether to drop out or take over.”³³⁹ Leary, as the most visible figurehead of the counterculture - due to his tireless self-promotion within the mainstream media - spoke of the dissociative, subjectivist stance in the following manner:

Counterculture may be found in (sometimes uneasy) alliance with radical, even revolutionary political groups and insurrectionary forces, and the memberships of countercultures and such groups often overlap. But the focus of counterculture is the power of ideas, images and artistic expression, not the acquisition of personal and political power. Thus, minority, alternative, and radical political parties are not themselves countercultures. While many countercultural memes have political implications, the seizure and maintenance of political power requires adherence to structures too inflexible to accommodate the innovation and exploration that are basic to countercultural *raison d'être*.³⁴⁰

Whilst I do not concur with Leary’s separation of the more overtly political movements from the ‘classic’ counterculture, the subjectivist stance is clearly illustrated. Charles A. Reich, a Professor of Law at Harvard, who was well known

³³⁸ William Burroughs, in Daniel Oldier, *The Job: Interviews with William S. Burroughs* (New York: Grove Press, 1970), p. 74.

³³⁹ Allen Watts, quoted in “Changes,” in *The San Francisco Oracle*, no.7 (April 1967), quoted in Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, p. 30.

³⁴⁰ Timothy Leary, foreword to *Counterculture Through the Ages: From Abraham to Acid House*, by Ken Goffman and Dan Joy (New York: Villard Books), p. x.

for his resolutely countercultural leanings, argued in his book *The Greening of America*, a bestseller in 1970: "The great error of our times has been the belief in structural or institutional solutions. The enemy is within each of us; so long as that is true, one structure is as bad as another."³⁴¹ In this emphasis upon an 'inner' approach to liberation, Anger's associate Timothy Leary took the dissociative stance to the extreme in his manifesto *Start Your Own Religion*: "Quit school. Quit your job. Don't vote. Avoid all politics...Dismiss the Judaic-Christian-Marxist-puritan-literary-existentialist suggestion that the drop-out is escape and that the conformist cop-out is reality."³⁴² The absolute primacy of the necessity for the alteration of the self is evident in Leary's belief that he and his associates were part of "a historical movement that would inevitably change man at the very centre of his nature, his consciousness."³⁴³

Anger's work is undoubtedly situated within this particular cultural arena. His practice engaged directly with the Sixties politics of consciousness through his aspiration to induce a transformation of the psyche, in much the same manner as Leary and his evangelical approach to LSD. For such individuals, there was no difference in the ultimate aim of liberation; only in procedure and metaphysical basis. One may compare it in a fashion to the division between those socialists who believe in the necessity of a vanguard party, and those of a stronger anarchic leaning. The romantic anarchist paradigm was a very powerful force in Sixties America, and one that needs to be acknowledged, despite what I would argue to be its utopian aspirations. Goffman has argued that the subjectivist stance is a

³⁴¹ Reich, *The Greening of America*, p. 297.

³⁴² Timothy Leary, *Start Your Own Religion* (New York: Kyira Press, 1967), pp. 4-5.

³⁴³ Timothy Leary, quoted in *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 150.

distinct characteristic not only of the counterculture of the Sixties, but also numerous movements that have existed throughout history:

The foremost aim of countercultures is not...to seize or dismantle the reins of external control or to wage war against those who hold them – although countercultures may passionately participate in such endeavours at times. Rather, countercultures seek primarily to live with as much freedom from constraints on individual creative will as possible, wherever and however it is possible to do so. And when people exercise this kind of freedom with commitment and vigor, they unblock the light so that future generations may bask in its glow.³⁴⁴

Needless to say, criticisms of this approach were offered by many; not least by Marcuse, despite his acknowledgement that any liberation must be preceded by a change in consciousness. Contrary to the romantic anarchist approach (and in a consideration that is avowedly materialist), Marcuse argued that "the roots of repression are and remain real roots; consequently, their eradication remains a real and rational job."³⁴⁵ Indeed, it must be stated the present author shares the concerns put forth by the activist wing of the counterculture. The Sixties notion of 'dropping out' was in itself only feasibly applicable to white, middle-class individuals. Austin raises the extremely pertinent objection when he asks: "How were the majority of African-Americans and the poor supposed to 'drop out', since they were never allowed 'in' to begin with?"³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Goffman and Joy, *Counterculture Through the Ages*, p. xvi.

³⁴⁵ Marcuse, "A Critique of Norman O. Brown," *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (London: Mayfly Books, 200) p. 178.

³⁴⁶ Austin, "Rome is Burning (Psychedelic)," p. 196.

Austin eloquently summarises the differences in approaches between the schools:

Activists, in their commitment to challenging social inequalities, were often at odds with the other, countercultural wing of the era's youth culture usually associated with hippies. For hippies, social change began with the individual freeing herself or himself from the social conditioning that made inequality possible, later encapsulated by psychedelic prankster George Clinton slogan from the 1970s: 'Free your mind and your ass will follow'. Hippies were most likely to follow Kesey's scenario of social transformation through hallucinogens, although they shared all of the scenarios' suspicions, if not outright rejection, of attempts to reform or reshape society through political action. The activist wing, in turn, viewed the counterculture as irresponsible and bourgeois.³⁴⁷

Despite the undoubtedly utopian quality of this approach, the concentration upon the primacy of consciousness as the site of any potential change, was a defining aspect of the extreme end of the subjectivist approach. For James, the Beats believed that "any systematic attempt to reconstruct society as a whole by rationally derived and progressively implemented programs could only reproduce the materialism and instrumentalism that made modern civilization."³⁴⁸ James describes how "the Beats were not programmatically political, but were utopian in their belief that artist-citizens would be the leaders of a new society. Theirs was 'a revolution of the soul', a revolution of the spirit - a utopia based on the intense embrace of experience, often evading logic, bypassing reason, and staying in the presence of sensation."³⁴⁹ This particular approach is illustrated eloquently by the work of Ginsberg, with Roszack describing how "his protest does not run back to Marx; it reaches out, instead, to the ecstatic radicalism of Blake. The issue is never as simple as social justice; rather, the key words and images are those of time and

³⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 195-196.

³⁴⁸ James, *Allegories of Cinema*, p. 94

³⁴⁹ Lisa Phillips, "Beat Culture: America Revisioned," p. 31.

eternity, madness and vision, heaven and the spirit.”³⁵⁰ In the words of Farrell: “These bohemians abandoned cultural expectations of marriage, career, and suburban affluence in favour of a Beat lifestyle of voluntary poverty, sexual freedom, personal expression, and heightened consciousness. Avant-garde art often united the communities, as these hipsters applied Beat perspectives to everyday life.”³⁵¹

(2.5) Counterculture and the Emergence of Underground Film

What was the relationship between Sixties avant-garde filmic practice, and the political personalism as exemplified by the Beats? In the various histories offered by scholars such as Rees,³⁵² Sitney,³⁵³ Reekie,³⁵⁴ and Tyler,³⁵⁵ the general terminology used to describe this point of time within the history of avant-garde cinema, is ‘Underground Film’. Incidentally, Anger rejects the terms avant-garde, experimental, and underground film as inapplicable to his practice: “Avant-Garde is too pretentious. Experimental makes it sound like tinkering in the garage. And underground, that I never accepted. It’s just another way of staying outside the mainstream. I’m an independent filmmaker. It may sound colorless, but that’s what I am.”³⁵⁶ Regardless of Anger’s personal preference for the terminology applicable to his practice, if - within the histories of such cinematic forms - one had to attach any label to Anger’s Sixties practice, it would certainly be that of

³⁵⁰ Roszack, *The Making of a Counterculture*, p. 126.

³⁵¹ Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 203.

³⁵² Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*,

³⁵³ Sitney, *Visionary Film*.

³⁵⁴ Reekie, *Subversion*.

³⁵⁵ Tyler Parker, *Underground Film: A Critical History* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995).

³⁵⁶ Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 240.

Underground Film, given that he was an integral factor in the development of this particular incarnation of the filmic avant-garde tradition. Reekie describes how “Underground cinema first developed around the late 1950s as a component of the emergent counter-culture; a heretical and mercurial combination of experimental film, amateur cine culture, pop, beat, camp, radical agit-prop and anti-art.”³⁵⁷ Underground film flowed throughout all approaches towards societal change – from the romantic anarchist, to that of the overtly political. As always, aesthetic practice was an integral part of these cultural formations. The aspiration for ‘aesthetic revolution’ was made possible only by the dramatic proliferation of avant-garde filmic practice that occurred within the US in the postwar period. With the increase in economic prosperity that characterised ‘the affluent society’, ease of access to artistic materials increased, with the arts being significantly boosted by the stimulated economic growth.

Reekie describes how “the emergence of Underground Cinema in the late 1950s was the culmination of the specifically American tendencies in the post-war experimental scene which were condensed and augmented by the Beat movement.”³⁵⁸ In the words of Paul Arthur: “Although it was never supposed that film could be a principle agent of social transformation, it was granted a supporting role by many rebels and a vanguard role by some.”³⁵⁹ For Arthur, “whatever degree this utopian conviction is already inscribed in the work of Vertov, Epstein and others, its consummate expression and true home is in the American culture of the 1960s.”³⁶⁰ To Anger’s romantic anarchist strain, film was

³⁵⁷ Reekie, *Subversion*, p. 140.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

³⁵⁹ Arthur, *Line of Sight*, pp. 1-2.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

an integral element in this effort to prompt psychical forms of emancipation. The utopian aspirations of the countercultural desire to express authentic states of being were also being aesthetically realised in the formal content of the films produced during the period:

Films marked with amateurism, incompetence and poverty were enjoyed as spontaneous, honest and democratic subversions of the sedated commercial cinema and the repression of legitimate culture. Surreal and fantastic distortions of narrative space and time were perceived as glimpses of alternate, occult and liberated realities. Abstract and experimental cinematic techniques were enjoyed not as art but as psychedelic visual stimulation which promoted or enhanced hallucinogenic intoxication and cosmic fantasy. Taboo images of sex, violence and death were relished for the transgressive thrill of evading the square inertia. The attraction of the Underground was subversion.³⁶¹

Underground film began with “a phase of activity around the concept of a New American Cinema.”³⁶² This was superseded by the founding of the Filmmakers Cooperative in New York, which came about shortly after the death of the iconic Maya Deren. Anger was associated with both the Co-op and the Canyon Cinema, having films distributed by both outlets. A personal friend of both Jonas Mekas and Bruce Baillie, his films were regularly screened in both New York and San Francisco. As in the methods of change that were propagated by the counterculture at large – and as illustrated most dramatically by the Dialectics of Liberation Conference – divisions arose surrounding the proposed function of art in relation to the drive for liberation. Underground film was not excluded from the differences of opinion regarding the proposed methods of implementing change within the counterculture. Underground film had a malleable and shifting alliance

³⁶¹ Reekie, *Subversion*, p. 142.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

with the more overtly political elements of the Sixties, as Arthur illustrates: "Like other convergences between political groups and countercultural activities, divergent ideologies advocating societal change through the liberation of individual consciousness or through mass action coexisted uneasily."³⁶³ As Arthur has noted, there was "published criticism of the avant-garde for its lack of social commitment."³⁶⁴ The romanticist, intensely subjectivist position was illustrated most eloquently by poet Kenneth Rexroth, when he stated: "Against the ruin of the world, there is only one defense – the creative act."³⁶⁵ Roszack articulates the rather extreme sentiment of the subjectivist position when he states: "The artist who clings to his impossible vision at least preserves that much of heaven among us; the mad realist who turns from that vision for the sake of another 'practical' measure only takes us one step further into the hell of our alienation."³⁶⁶

Despite such questionable assertions, Banes has argued that the aesthetic forms produced during the era were, in fact, integral to these shifting cultural modes, when she writes:

The Sixties artists' search defined an era. It became part of the massive political and cultural upheavals of the late 1960s when the scene of action moved out not only from the galleries and theatres, but also from the ghettos, universities, workplaces, and kitchens, and into the streets...They were not just 'reflections' of society; they helped shape the very form and style of political and cultural protest in the later Sixties.³⁶⁷

³⁶³ Arthur, *A Line of Sight*, p. 12.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Kenneth Rexroth, "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation," *Bureau of Public Secrets*, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/rexroth/beats.htm>.

³⁶⁶ Roszack, *The Making of a Counterculture*, p. 101.

³⁶⁷ Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, p. 9.

Suarez points out that while divergences existed between explicitly political oppositional groups and the avant-garde, a thematic correlation between the two regarding their oppositional character united them:

By virtue of their conflictive insertion within the larger society, avant-garde groups are...oppositional formations; they tend to operate in open disagreement with established cultural and social institutions or with the conditions in which such institutions exist...The American underground film movement is one such oppositional formation...The underground's oppositional thrust can be associated thematically and ideologically with other waves of dissent of the 1960's such as youth movements, sexual liberation fronts, civil rights organisations, and the forms of protest and social experimentation often referred to as the "counterculture."³⁶⁸

Sally Banes argues that there is certainly not a division – a reading that is important for my own work – when she states: "Despite the apparently apolitical stance of many of their works...models for both political and artistic radicalism *were* created simultaneously."³⁶⁹

This particular split regarding the prescribed approaches towards socio-political change draws certain parallels with instances within the Surrealist movement. In the words of Masters and Houston:

Surrealism was born out of a sense of outrage directed at what was conceived to be the criminality of social institutions. This outrage first took the form of a rejection of social reality for a realm of visions and truth far more conducive to personal well-being than the world at large...Later, for some, this inner world seemed less satisfying, and they

³⁶⁸ Suárez, *Bike-Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars*, p. 53.

³⁶⁹ Banes, *Greenwich Village*, p. 7.

engaged themselves in social change through flirtations with Communism and more serious relationships with Marxism.³⁷⁰

Anger has inherited the aspirations of the Surrealists concerned with the transfiguration of the psyche and is, in this respect, a direct heir of the Surrealist tradition. Whilst in high school, Anger developed an interest in the work of the Surrealists, which was facilitated by an enthusiasm for French literature. Such interests were important to the particular trajectory of his aesthetic development, as Anger's early work lies firmly within the Surrealist canon; a particular aesthetic modality that would undergo a distinct shift in the Sixties, towards pure psychedelia. The Surrealists were polemically against 'mere formalism', and Anger continues this particular antipathy, even in his most recent cinematic works. In the words of Rees, "the Surrealists, for whom the formal autonomous image was anathema, proposed instead to seek the 'marvellous',"³⁷¹ and it is this quality that Anger has continued to seek throughout the many years of his practice. The French avant-garde of the period 1920-30 was thought to be a primary influence upon the young Anger, with Brunel and Dali's *Un Chein Andalour* (1928) being of particular importance. Indeed, France is vitally important to Anger's early practice, not only through his love of European avant-garde filmic works, but also its poetry and literature; in particular, *Les Chants de Maldoror* (written between 1868 and 1869), the major work of La Comte de Lautreamont; a stated 'hero' of Anger.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ Robert E L Masters and Jean Houston, *Psychedelic Art*, (London: Weidenfeild and Nicolson, 1968), p. 160.

³⁷¹ Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 54.

³⁷² Please see Appendix.

Whilst not a Surrealist himself, the filmmaker and artist who had the most formative impact upon the young Anger was Jean Cocteau. Cocteau can be considered the forerunner of the 'psychodrama' in America, whose primary instigators within the US were Maya Deren with *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1945), Gregory Markopolous' *Swain* (1950), Curtis Harrington's *Fragment of Seeking* (1946) and *Picnic* (1948), and of course, Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947). In 1950, after travelling to Paris in order to meet Cocteau, Anger managed to secure a position working for both Cocteau and Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque Française. One can certainly ascertain Cocteau's influence upon Anger's early work; an archetypal mythos framed within self-referential cinematic modernity is a hallmark of Anger's practice. P. Adams Sitney frequently refers to Anger's debt to French Romantic poetry, arguing that "the roots of Anger's aesthetic lie in French Romantic decadence of the late nineteenth century."³⁷³ This is not to state, however, that the early American avant-garde was not of significance to Anger. The filmmaker provided an essay on Alla Nazimova's *Salomé* (1928) in The Anthology Film Archive's collection, *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1893-1941*, and in 1947, along with Curtis Harrington, a childhood friend,³⁷⁴ he formed the 'Creative Film Associates', which according to Anger's biographer, Bill Landis, "distributed the Whitney Brothers' films and those of various East Coast filmmakers."³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 100.

³⁷⁴ Their friendship was particularly turbulent, as it seems it is the case with so many of Anger's associates. When Harrington died, Anger arrived as a guest at the funeral with a cameraman in tow. He was refused entry unless he dispensed with the cameraman, and after a brief altercation he relented and dispensed with the camera. During the service Anger shouted responses almost constantly to a speech by the actor Jack Larson, and at the end announced that he would die on Halloween night, October 2008.

³⁷⁵ Landis, Bill, *Anger*, p. 21.

Within the realm of America's Sixties avant-garde film however, there was a discernable split between the explicitly political avant-garde and the more anarchic denizens of Underground film. Political art – in particular, political film – was associated more with formal approaches towards social change, rather than the liberation of the repressed psychology, as prescribed by the romantic anarchists. Within the realm of overtly political art, artists were thought to be serving a distinct purpose. In the words of Lunacharsky: "If revolution can give art its soul, then art can give revolution its mouthpiece."³⁷⁶ I would argue that ultimately all art is ideologically inflected and therefore participates in cultural politics, but I am specifically referring to works that are purposefully constructed (and shown) with the intent to register a distinct cultural impact within a political sense.

As well as the more overtly political art, there is the question of the politics of representation. For the vast majority of the artists of the period, "the promise of witnessing, of recording as a means of political representation, persons, attitudes, and events traditionally excluded from commercial channels was not simply propedeutic but virtually commensurate with social empowerment."³⁷⁷ As Wheeler Dixon and Gwendolyn Foster describe, such filmmakers "tackled themes of race relations, sexuality, drugs, social conventions, and other topics that the conventional cinema consciously avoided. More than anything else, the experimental cinema of the 1960s was an advocate for social change and complete

³⁷⁶ Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Revolution and Art," in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*, ed. John E. Bowlt (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988): p. 191, quoted in Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, trans. Aileen Derieg (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 12.

³⁷⁷ Arthur, *Line of Sight*, p. 2.

artistic freedom.”³⁷⁸ Indeed, much has been written on Anger’s contribution towards Queer cinema.³⁷⁹ Whilst this is immensely important, for the purposes of this present work I am primarily concerned with the romantic ethos that underlies his practice. Ultimately, I believe that his work is concerned not only with affirmative representation, but also with a utopian desire to prompt a direct psychical, metaphysical transformation, with a view to liberation. The processes of bringing affirmative representations into the public sphere are empowering in themselves, but I feel a consideration of Anger’s sensorially immersive, psychically inculcate cinema is necessary if we are to apprehend the crux of his specific methodology toward psychical alteration.

(2.5) Film as Redemptive of The Human Condition

The specific approach that Anger utilised was directly linked to the Beat use of art - following that of ‘the visionary tradition’. As James rightly states: “The beat revolt was aesthetic, romantically proposing a revolution of consciousness in art as the origin of social revolution,” and that art “was commonly the metaphor, the agent, and the arena of dissent.”³⁸⁰ In the myriad forms of social disturbance to which the Sixties was host, the function of art as a tool of cultural and political concern remained constant. Yet what was the function of film – and in particular the work

³⁷⁸ Wheeler Dixon and Gwendolyn Foster, “Toward a New History of The Experimental Film” in *Experimental Cinema: The Film Reader*, eds. Wheeler Dixon and Gwendolyn Foster (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 7.

³⁷⁹ Please see Matthew Tincom, *Working Like A Homosexual: Camp, Capital, and Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), Juan Antonio Suárez, *Bike-Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars: Avant-garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), and Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

³⁸⁰ James, *Allegories of Cinema*, p. 94.

of Anger - in relation to the romantic anarchist-strain concerned with utopian psychical emancipation? Within Underground film, "audio/visual experiment was an integrated element of a broader subversion of bourgeois authority, a subversion which also celebrated psychedelic drug use, Utopian radicalism, ecstatic mysticism and other forms of altered perception."³⁸¹ Crucially, in this form, filmic presentation was seen as a tool that could be utilised in the freeing of consciousness. For Anger and the romantic anarchist strain at large, film would have a particularly expressive function, in that it aspired to be - what Annette Michelson termed in her important essay, "Film and The Radical Aspiration" - "redemptive of the human condition."³⁸²

In an interview with Tony Rayns and John DuCane, Anger explicitly conveys his utopian, emancipatory intent, when he speaks of his films in the following manner: "I know that I have a certain sign that I can flash, which is so simple it's like somebody scratching their head, which is a key to let's say an alchemical secret, or a golden flower, or a Venusian computer (if you want to get fancy) for changing the world."³⁸³ As I argue, the political aspect of Anger is certainly there to be found, but I believe it should be interpreted in a manner that is considerate of the specific approach he is taking - namely, to 'liberate consciousness'. Despite the decidedly utopian quality of this aim, within the avant-garde of the Sixties there was a specific cluster of filmmakers who sought to do just that. Michelson has written of a specific "aspect of the radical aspiration in American film. It is postulated on a conception of film as being, in the very broadest sense, redemptive of the human

³⁸¹ Reekie, *Subversion*, p. 142.

³⁸² Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Cooper Square, 2000), p. 416.

³⁸³ Rayns and DuCane, "Dedication to Create Make Believe," p. 48.

condition itself.”³⁸⁴ I would argue that Anger is a staunch member of this particular strain of the US avant-garde film community. In a continuation of the Romantic tradition, filmmakers concerned with such practice were expressing “an extension of a strain of Romantic thought about artistic creation. By giving free reign to imagination and inspiration, the Romantic artist rejects a tradition that has become meaningless, and manages to transcend the gray, mundane world of ordinary reason.”³⁸⁵

This particular form of Sixties film is expressive of a discernable part of the romantic aspiration. As I have argued, the Sixties embodied a distinct trajectory in which modernist and postmodern elements intermesh; yet this is coupled with a distinct lineage within the counterculture that can be described as ‘neo-romantic’. Ellwood elucidates: “In connection with the modernism-postmodernism theme, the role of the earlier romanticism is provocative and ambivalent. Though in itself individualist, ‘spiritual’, and often backward looking, it provided a powerful impetus for many of the ideals that made the modern.”³⁸⁶ Within the romantic-anarchist movement there were still many traits that were evocative of modernity and its totalising discourses, and within romanticism - as with modernism - there was a focus upon the dualism of alienation and authenticity. The issue is complex, however, as whilst within this strain of the counterculture that retained the totalising metanarratives of modernity, a specific grouping – centring around the romantic - rejected the rationalism that modernity entailed, resulting in a complex mesh of modernist and romantic leanings. In the words of Martin: “The contrast

³⁸⁴ Michellson, “Film and the Radical Aspiration,” p. 416.

³⁸⁵ James Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema* (Michigan: Wayne State University, 1994), p. 4.

³⁸⁶ Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, p. 214.

between the rational and the irrational Left has of course, a long history, though the contemporary drift to irrationalism and to subjectivism is particularly strong.”³⁸⁷ He describes how “it is possible to trace a continuous counterpoint between rationalism and romanticism within the non-communist Left.”³⁸⁸ Within the Sixties, this romantic element is expressed through the visionary impulse of practitioners such as Anger. The function of art in what Sedgwick defines as the ‘irrationalist’ strain, was distinctly utopian in its aspiration, with Anger’s films embodying much of this visionary impulse.

This specific tendency is perhaps best considered through Anger’s relation to a key practitioner in this field - Stan Brakhage. Anger and Brakhage were very close friends for a number of years, until their relationship deteriorated, initially due to Brakhage collecting Mekas’ ‘Film Culture Award of 1979’, when Anger believed he himself should have been the rightful recipient. This was further exacerbated by the lectures Brakhage was giving on luminaries of the American Avant-Garde, which included Anger. An intensely private person, Anger was incensed that their relationship enabled Brakhage to speak publicly with such insight into his personal life. This bitter split culminated in Anger making an – unreleased – work entitled *The Denunciation of Stan Brakhage* (1979). Despite the acrimonious end to their relationship, both shared a love of romantic mysticism, and had extremely lofty aspirations for the functionality of their aesthetic practice. Both were practitioners concerned with metaphysical transformation, with a view to heightened or expanded awareness. Whilst Brakhage did not adhere to a specific ideology, he was highly influenced by mysticism and romanticism in general. In

³⁸⁷ Martin, “R.D. Laing,” p. 179.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

the words of Peterson: “Brakhage embraces what we can call a ‘total liberation’ theory of the avant-garde. His formulation of this theory and the films it inspired may be particularly radical examples of the American avant-garde cinema’s aesthetic of liberation.”³⁸⁹ In this aim, Brakhage “wants to make you see,”³⁹⁰ and in this respect, Anger was a staunch aesthetic ally.

This issue is implicitly tied to spiritual metaphysics, in that both Brakhage, Anger, and other Sixties artists were, as we shall see, influenced in this aim by spiritual systems. Anger’s friend Alejandro Jodorowski is another avant-garde filmic artist very much concerned with the utilisation of aesthetics as a doorway to spiritual experience. Influenced by the esoteric, much like Anger – although his path follows a more Sufi and Tarot based approach – Jodorowski has stated: “I believe in an art (that) can heal a person. I am trying to do that...like a medicine. And I believe in an art that can open the mind. I see a world that is sick...This world, economically is ill. Morally is ill. Spiritually is ill. The planet is ill. We need to make an art that will kill that.”³⁹¹ Ron Rice was another Sixties filmmaker who explored the occult within his practice. Rice is a particularly undervalued artist in many respects, and his work may only be sourced through the Filmmakers Co-operative in New York. As Banes describes, highlighting the psychoactive substance association with magick, which is addressed in the next chapter: “For Rice, magic and ritual were bound up with the altered states of consciousness that drugs induce.”³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos*, p. 4.

³⁹⁰ Fred Camper, introductory essay to *By Brakhage: Anthology*, DVD booklet (New York: The Criterion Collection, 2001), p. 4.

³⁹¹ Alejandro Jodorowski, quoted in Ben Cobb, *Anarchy and Alchemy: The Films of Alejandro Jodorowski* (London: Creation Books, 2007), p. 270.

³⁹² Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, p. 248.

Politics and mysticism were caught up in a colourful mix within the Sixties; in a line that ran from Marx and Mao, to the I Ching and the work of Alan Watts. What tied them thematically – despite the huge problems in such a union – was an ‘illuminatory impulse’; one that can be interpreted in either a secular or spiritual fashion. Diedrichsen writes on this particular Sixties cultural characteristic:

Mysticism and politics could be mixed up on a daily basis, either deliberately or out of habit, producing a culture whose aesthetic form could easily conceal its dual antagonistic genealogy. Techniques aimed at emancipation and others meant to boost the intuition blended into one another. In a theory of manipulation, knowledge of a true world behind things could be meant in political or mystical terms.³⁹³

Mystical illumination and political emancipation are uneasy bedfellows, yet in the Sixties they were lumped together in one overwhelming impetus to break through illusory and repressive psycho and socio-political structures. Importantly, the forms of mysticism that were popular within the Sixties were mostly, or at least claimed to be, anti-authoritarian. Henri Bergson defined institutional forms of religious belief as ‘static religion’, whereas he defined as ‘dynamic’ those based upon experiential forms.³⁹⁴ Michael Goddard describes how “the principle of effect of static religion is to induce a somnolence, which led Marx to diagnose religion as the opiate of the masses, and which tends to foster an atmosphere of blind obedience and conformity to social and religious norms.”³⁹⁵ The relation between mysticism and what may be deemed the conventional political spectrum is exceeding complex, and exists as a specific arena of discourse in itself. Mysticism,

³⁹³ Diedrichsen, “Veiling and Unveiling,” p. 86.

³⁹⁴ Michael Goddard, “The Scattering of Time Crystals: Deleuze, Mysticism, and Cinema” in *Deleuze and Religion*, ed. Mary Bryden (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 58.

³⁹⁵ Goddard, “The Scattering of Time Crystals,” p. 58.

particularly in its more esoteric forms - namely the occult - has long been associated in academic thought with the Right of the political spectrum. This is due to a variety of reasons, not least of which is that organised religion has demonstrated itself to be one of the most repressive institutions within human affairs, with Marx providing the most obvious – and frequently cited - critique: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”³⁹⁶

The linking of dynamic religion with more institutional forms is an unfortunate homogenisation of a diverse and wide field, however, as adherents of mystical doctrines have been long involved in what may be deemed progressive left-wing politics, as well as, admittedly, those of the Right. Such modes of spiritual practice are not concerned with the propagation of religious doctrine - which has at its core an implicit affirmation of structural formations of political and social institutions - but rather, what they consider to be the spiritual development of subjectivity. One may argue, however, that this is impossible as ideology and power inflect all aspects of subjectivity. However, it is important to note that there is a difference in the organisational aspect of the two forms, in that organised religion has an institutional framework – a hierarchical system of power relations between individuals - rather than an emphasis upon the self as the principle authority of authentic knowledge.

³⁹⁶ Karl Marx, introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Collected Works* 3 (Paris, 1844): <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.

Whilst I do not wish to dwell too long on the occult, it would be a particular omission not to mention it in relation to this post-war US visionary strain of art. Although I am not treading this particular route, Robert Ellwood describes how

in the early twenty-first century, as a recent spate of conferences and books (e.g. the works of recognised scholars like Antoine Faivre, Jocelyn Godwin, and Huston Smith) makes evident, a revival of interest on both academic and popular levels in this tradition is taking place. No longer dismissed as fringe or irrational, it is accepted as having a table in the marketplace of ideas, presenting serious offerings, both philosophically and experientially.³⁹⁷

The reading I am offering is not from within the esoteric tradition, but rather, through the critical lens of academic study. This particular methodology is outlined by John Holman, in which “the approach commonly promoted (if not prescribed) is the ‘agnostic-empirical’. What is observable to all of us...is the *conceptions* of the esotericists – not what these conceptions are or may be *of*...These conceptions, as we elicit them, are to be presented ‘neutrally’ (i.e. without expressing an opinion on their veracity).”³⁹⁸

Interest in occultism during the Sixties was widespread.³⁹⁹ Chris Lachman offers one proposition as to why, in the realm of popular cultural texts, there was such an outpouring of interest in esoteric subjects:

³⁹⁷ Robert Ellwood, foreword to *The Return of the Perennial Philosophy*, by John Holman (London: Watkins, 2008), p. xi.

³⁹⁸ Holman, *The Return of the Perennial Philosophy*, p. xvii.

³⁹⁹ This subculture was especially prominent in the 1960s, yet began as a distinct cultural shift with the ‘occult revival’ of 1910. As Bruce Elder points out, “Rosicrucianism, Cabalism, Blavatskyism, astrology, alchemy, spiritualism, Satanism, and neo-Buddhism were as common in Paris in the 1910s as they were in San Francisco in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (Bruce Elder, *The Films of Stan Brakhage in the American Tradition of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson* [Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press], p. 77).

One factor has to be the publication in Paris in 1960 – translated published in English in 1963 – of one of the decade’s most influential books, *Le Matin des Magiciens* (*The Morning of The Magicians*) by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier. A bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic and Channel, *The Morning of the Magicians* sparked the mass interest in ‘all things occultly marvellous’ that characterized the time and influenced some of the leading figures in popular culture.⁴⁰⁰

Other texts that were profoundly influential included the works of Alan Watts and Carlos Castaneda, which questioned the dominant models of Western religion. This in itself is linked to a critique of the modern reverence for technology. This distaste for modernity is a marked characteristic of occultism, and may be considered a form of ‘primitivism’.⁴⁰¹ In the words of Ken Gelder: “Much attention has been given to what have been broadly referred to as ‘neo-Pagans’, people who live out anachronistic predicaments by bringing pre-Christian religious beliefs and rituals into modern life.”⁴⁰² Partridge describes how, “many of those within the occult milieu are convinced that the contemporary world has much to learn from premodern and primal cultures and that, to some extent, the modern period has seen a regression rather than a progression of human understanding of the nature of reality.”⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ Gary Lachman, *Turn off your Mind: The Dedalus Book of the 1960s* (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2010), p. 7.

⁴⁰¹ ‘Primitivism’ as an academic term has a particularly complicated status, and carries with it a number of unpleasant connotations, not least of which is a distinct colonial association; as such, I use the term with a degree of hesitation. There has been much debate surrounding its utilisation within academic dialogue, and as numerous commentators have pointed out, its contextual applicative utilisation varies considerably. For a detailed study in relation to aesthetics, please see *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art: A Documentary History*, eds. Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch (Berkley California: University of California Press, 2003).

⁴⁰² Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 136.

⁴⁰³ Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London: T&T Clarke International, 2004), p. 69.

As stated, Crowley was one of the pre-eminent adopted icons of the spiritually concerned faction of the counterculture.⁴⁰⁴ Phil Hine, a writer who William Burroughs has described as producing “the most concise statement of the logic of modern magic,”⁴⁰⁵ has written of Crowley’s influence:

Crowley's (enthusiastic) experiments with both drugs and sexual magick were a far cry from the "spiritual asceticism" expounded by many of his contemporaries. While "spirituality" was generally seen in terms of philosophies that reject the bodily or somatic experience, Crowley laid the foundations of a Western approach to development which integrated both the psychic and somatic areas of experience. It was not until the 1960's, and the arrival of the "Psychedelic Era" that such an approach received widespread (and serious) attention. The 1960's ushered in the beginnings of what Timothy Leary terms "hedonic technology" - the discovery of pleasure over restriction via drugs, sexuality, dance, music, massage, yoga and diet. The "Psychedelic Era" also brought with it a great "Occult Revival," with particular interest in hedonistically-orientated magick, such as Tantra and Crowley’s cult of Thelema.⁴⁰⁶

Hugh Urban has argued that despite the lack of attention given to Crowley, he is “a fascinating figure worthy of attention by scholars of religion and of profound importance for the understanding of modern society as a whole.”⁴⁰⁷

This emphasis upon Crowley was part of the widespread concern with the mystical and the visionary within the spiritually inclined aspects of the Sixties countercultural movements. To the Beats, as forerunners of the counterculture,

⁴⁰⁴ Such iconic status is most popularly represented by Crowley’s inclusion on the front cover of The Beatles’ *Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Parlophone, 1967.

⁴⁰⁵ Gyrus, “Chaos and Beyond: An Interview with Phil Hine,” *Dreamflesh*, <http://dreamflesh.com/?PHPSESSID=8aaf23812430044caada42d830125ad9>

⁴⁰⁶ Phil Hine, “Kundalini: A Personal Approach,” http://www.philhine.org.uk/writings/tt_kapa.html.

⁴⁰⁷ Hugh Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (London: University of California Press Ltd, 2006) p. 110.

the visionary was of absolute importance, as Allen Ginsberg recounted at a conference devoted to the Beat experience at New York University:

Almost any of the seminal figures had had some kind of visionary experience....some sort of vision which they thought of as either supernatural or Buddhist or a variety of religious experience. William Burroughs from childhood has recorded any number of tricks of consciousness that were a break in the ordinary modality of consciousness for him."⁴⁰⁸

As Phillips further describes:

Much of Beat art and attitudes were informed by visionary experiences - psychic visions or visions attained through meditation or drugs. Gary Snyder had a satori experience in 1948 of everything sentient and alive; Ginsberg had a vision of Blake in the same year; Kerouac in Rocky Mount fell backward with a golden light in his eye, realizing that the universe is golden ash.⁴⁰⁹

This particular interest in the occult by parts of the counterculture has persisted to the present day in subcultural forms, and was instrumental in the formation of a distinct contemporary countercultural sphere, known as 'occulture'. Religious anthropologist Christopher Partridge has introduced the term to academia through his work *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture*.⁴¹⁰ While Partridge acknowledges the term was suggested to him by George McKay, in his work *Senseless Acts of Beauty*:

⁴⁰⁸ Allen Ginsberg at "The Beat Generation: Legacy and Celebration" conference at New York University (May 19, 1994), quoted in Phillips, *Beat Culture*, p. 32.

⁴⁰⁹ Phillips, "Beat Culture," p 32.

⁴¹⁰ Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London: T&T Clarke International, 2004), and *The Re-Enchantment of the West, Vol. 2. Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London: T&T Clarke, 2005).

Cultures of Resistance Since the Sixties,⁴¹¹ he believes the term to have originated from the artist/musician Genesis P-Orridge. P-Orridge has the following to say concerning McKay's usage of the term:

George Kane identifies 'a much wider and deeper culture of the irrational; a culture which we often identify with 'New Age' but which should properly be called occult'. I'm not sure how far New Age can be called a term of dignity but possibly we should indeed be making far greater use of the term occult, in its original sense of hidden (from sight) concealed...although their etymologies are in fact entirely different occult ought to be connected to culture, too, even counterculture.⁴¹²

Unfortunately, despite these progressive steps, mysticism - and its particular manifestation in occult doctrine - has continued to be associated with the right of the political spectrum. A number of recognised scholars who have written on esoteric forms of mysticism have been linked to far-right organizations; Julius Evola, despite his undoubted contribution to the field of anthropology, is a very controversial scholar, as his particularly odious far-right political leanings have been well documented by a number of historians.⁴¹³ Mercia Eliade, despite his immense contribution to religious studies, is also problematised by his staunch support for the Romanian fascist organisation 'The Iron Guard'.⁴¹⁴ A further reason for such an association is that a number of publications have emerged that linked the far-right – particularly the Nazi Party – with occult influences.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹¹ George McKay, *Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance Since the Sixties* (London: Verso, 1996).

⁴¹² Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in McKay, *Senseless Acts of Beauty*, p. 51-52, quoted in Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, p. 68.

⁴¹³ Franco Faerarresi, "Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right," in *European Journal of Sociology*, no. 28 (1987): pp. 107-151.

⁴¹⁴ Please see David Carrasco and Jane Marie Law, *Waiting for the Dawn: Mircea Eliade in Perspective* (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1991).

⁴¹⁵ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*

However, it remains that practitioners of the occult cannot be so neatly compartmentalised, since, like any diverse area of the demographic, their ideological affiliations are spread across the political spectrum.

Within academic discourse, mysticism is primarily seen to be 'reality denying', or concerned with transcendental speculations that are unrelated to any worldly condition. Georg Feuerstein elucidates:

The esoteric or spiritual worldview stands in sharp contrast to the consensus worldview, which is basically materialistic. The esoteric perspective represents a dimension of reality that is diametrically opposed to the one which by most people live their lives...Most importantly, the esoteric perspective also represents an alternative morality that is felt by many to be no morality at all, but rather the negation of moral values.⁴¹⁶

This may be termed the 'disengagement critique' - that mysticism is escapist; it fails to confront the dilemmas and difficulties of the world; it aims towards a transcendental dimension that disregards or negates the experience of the vast majority of people in the world. Indeed, there is much to be said for this argument. There is a discernable history of scholarly critique of mysticism, and many notable writers may be cited. George Bataille devoted the first section of his work *Inner Experience* (1942) - termed 'Critique of Dogmatic Servitude (and of Mysticism)' - to arguing against such forms.⁴¹⁷ Aldous Huxley - while a staunch supporter of various forms of mysticism and not a critic of the concept of mystical experience

(New York: New York University Press, 2002.), and *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

⁴¹⁶ Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment* (Prescott, Arizona: Hohm Press, 2006), p. xxiv.

⁴¹⁷ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

itself – offered the work *Grey Eminence: A Study in Religion and Politics*⁴¹⁸ in relation to this question. The work is a biography of François Leclerc du Tremblay, an advisor to Cardinal de Richelieu and an alleged mystic, but who was also responsible for prolonging the Thirty Years War. The book's central aim is to show that some forms of mystical enlightenment⁴¹⁹ are perhaps not incompatible with authoritarian and bloody regimes. The radical psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, in his work, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*,⁴²⁰ argued that a concern with mysticism diverts attention from the condition of injustice within the world, preventing a revolt against the real, material causes of misery. Thus, to fight the mystical thinking on which fascism is built, is a way to fight fascism itself.

However, those who would subscribe to the liberative potential of the mystical experience, argue that this world – or, more controversially, this mode of consensus reality - is but a small segment of the wider potentialities that are inherent within the human psyche, and maintain that the perennial experience of mystics from a variety of cultures validates this thesis. They argue that such claims are not based on the none more thorny issue of faith, but rather, on the direct experience of such spiritual states - couched in esoteric terms - that of 'gnosis' (Greek for knowledge). As a result of this approach, the justification for the emphasis upon the liberation of 'individual consciousness' - rather than a concentration upon the social - lies within the monist tenets that underlie much of the spirituality of the American counterculture of the Sixties. This ontological assumption is clearly elucidated by Robbins, in that it is an

⁴¹⁸ Aldous Huxley, *Grey Eminence: A Study in Religion and Politics*, (London: Flamingo, 1994).

⁴¹⁹ Huxley argues that Tremblay's enlightenment was incomplete – 'active annihilation' in Huxley's terms.

⁴²⁰ Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970).

assumption that the metaphysical unity of all beings can be taken as an immediate experiential reality, a simple 'fact to be viewed as a parameter for social action. If we are, immediately, 'All One,' then one person's expansions of consciousness automatically contributes significantly to the betterment of mankind...This is...the articulation of a too-simplistic monism, which provides a functional equivalent of utilitarian individualism.⁴²¹

James Wasserman describes how "the basis of occultism can be summed up in the word *correspondence*. The theory of correspondence recognizes an implicit interdependence of all things with all other things, the existence of multiple relationships between various aspects of Nature's kaleidoscopic richness."⁴²² Grounded within the magickal paradigm, Anger appears instinctively aware of this in relation to his aesthetic approach: "I am trying to get away from identifying with an actor or actress as a person. I want to move through nature, and the people are elements of nature also."⁴²³

At the Dialectics of Liberation Conference, Allen Ginsberg came under attack for his seeming emphasis upon the self, to the detriment of aiding society.⁴²⁴ When questioned on Ginsberg's apparent fetishisation of the individual, Laing defended Ginsberg's position: "It depends what you call his 'self.' The self that he takes himself to have arrived at is a universal self of which he, Allen Ginsberg, is but one fragment, so I don't think he's concerned with that individual fragment to the exclusion of the rest of the cosmos."⁴²⁵ As for Laing himself, Sedgwick points out

⁴²¹ Thomas Robbins, review of *New Age Blues: On the Politics of Consciousness*, by Michael Rossman, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19 (March 1980): p. 72.

⁴²² James Wasserman, *Art and Symbols of the Occult* (London: Tiger Books, 1993), p. 6.

⁴²³ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Kate Haug, "An Interview With Kenneth Anger," p. 84.

⁴²⁴ Laing, in *Ah! Sunflower*, directed Robert Klinkert and Ian Sinclair (1967; Picture Press, 2007) DVD.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

how the “celebration of mysticism and the inward-looking delights of the psychedelic ‘trip’, took place in the same period of left-wing politicisation in Laing.”⁴²⁶ He further describes “two developments in his thought whose conjunction appears as something of a paradox: his language becomes at once both *more socially committed* and *more mystical*.”⁴²⁷ As contradictory as this may seem, it was within such a climate that “the rational and the irrational, the scientific and the mystical rubbed shoulders with alarming intimacy.”⁴²⁸

As for the question of the politics of consciousness, what was at stake was none other than the location of reality itself:

The point at issue between the underground and the culture it opposed was no more and no less than the definition of reality. Was reality the ordinary, contingent day-to-day experience of Western society with its strictly limited pleasures and pains, or was this merely a mask that obscured some profounder and greater reality whose 'visionary splendor' involved a far more harmonious relationship between ourselves, and with our environment?⁴²⁹

The danger in such an approach is that “the sacralization of the self is fundamental.”⁴³⁰ As Partridge argues:

The problem with this form of religiosity is that it leads to epistemological individualism. There is no higher authority than the self. Personal experience is the final arbiter of truth...The general claim is often the essentialist/perennialist one that no path is better than

⁴²⁶ Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 95.

⁴²⁷ Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 94.

⁴²⁸ Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (London: Paladin, 1987): p. 16, quoted in Barry Curtis, “Building the Trip,” in *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, p. 163.

⁴²⁹ Hewison, *Too Much*, p. 83.

⁴³⁰ Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, p. 72.

another, all generally leading in the same direction, and there is a unifying cosmic something behind the apparent diversity.⁴³¹

Guignon further elucidates, describing three traits of the romantic interpretation of the nature of subjectivity:

The first is the attempt to recover a sense of oneness and wholeness that appears to have been lost...The second is the conviction that real 'truth' is discovered not by rational reflection and scientific method, but by total immersion in one's own deepest and most intense feelings...and the third is...at the limits of all experience, that the self is the highest and most all-encompassing of all that is found in reality.⁴³²

It is important to acknowledge that Anger's practice is situated wholeheartedly within a distinct lineage of aesthetic practitioners in search of a shamanic function in art. In many pre-modern societies, the roles of shaman and artist – along with many other social functions – were indistinct. In the words of Theodore Roszack:

The shaman might properly lay claim to being the culture hero *par excellence*...In the shaman, the first figure to have established himself in human society as an individual personality, several great talents were inextricably combined that have since become specialized professions. It is likely that men's first efforts at pictorial art – and brilliant efforts they were as they survive in the form of the great paleolithic cave paintings – were the work of shamans practising a strange, graphic magic....In his inspired tale-telling we might find the beginnings of mythology, and so of literature; in his masked and painted impersonations, the origin of drama; in his entranced gyrations, the first gestures of the dance. He was – besides being artist, poet, dramatist, dancer – his people's healer, moral counsellor, diviner and cosmologist.⁴³³

⁴³¹ Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, pp. 32-33.

⁴³² Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p. 51.

⁴³³ Roszack, *The Making of a Counterculture*, p. 243.

With the advancement of history and the myriad complex changes that accompanied such progression, these associations are no longer widely held. However, many artists have striven to maintain this archaic tradition of utilising aesthetic practice in a transformatory function. It is perhaps interesting to note that in his 1993 work *Technicians of Ecstasy: Shamanism and the Modern Artist*,⁴³⁴ Mark Levy rather controversially argues that modern artists serve what can be described as a shamanic function in society, and that many such artists are ‘unaware’ they are functioning in such a fashion. Levy’s thesis appears to draw upon the work of Mircea Eliade, from whom Levy derived the title of his book; seemingly a homage to Eliade’s seminal 1951 work *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*.⁴³⁵

Despite such controversies, the association of art and the occult stretches far back into the annals of art history. In the words of Sean Konecky:

This line runs from antiquity through the anonymous masters of the Middle Ages, the great painters of the Renaissance, and the 19th Century Symbolists to artists of the present day. Edgar Wind, in his important study of Renaissance art, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, demonstrates the debt that Botticelli, Titian, and Michelangelo, among others, owed to the Neo-Platonist philosophies of their contemporaries Marsilio Ficino and Piccolanda Mirandola.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴Mark Levy, in his work *Technicians of Ecstasy: Shamanism and the Modern Artist* (Norfolk, Conn Bramble Books, 1993) rather controversially argues that modern artists serve what can be described as a shamanic function in society; and that many such artists are ‘unaware’ they are functioning as such a cultural component. Such a thesis appears to draw on the work of Mircea Eliade, from whom Levy seemingly derived the title of his book; a homage to Eliade’s seminal 1951 work *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴³⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*.

⁴³⁶ Sean Konecky, “Symbolist and Visionary Art” in James Wasserman, *Art and Symbols of the Occult* (London: Tiger Books International), p. 117.

Anger's contemporary (and influence), Maya Deren, was an ordained Voodoo Shaman; an artist whose aesthetic practice was first and foremost a vehicle for emancipatory concerns. Deren was an initiate of the spiritual lineage, even producing a work concerned with the ritual practices of the religion, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (shot between 1947-53, and assembled after Deren's death by her husband Teiji Ito). The particular model of ritual that Deren strove to translate into her cinematic practice was concerned with the attempted dissolution of the spectatorial ego, in specific relation to the standardised forms of subjectivity constructed by the bourgeois socio-sphere, which bears testimony to her additional debt to Marxist thought. Deren has a particular correlation to my work on Anger, as she stated, most eloquently in her text "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film" (1946),⁴³⁷ that her films were ritualised constructs in themselves, ultimately concerned with the psychical, and, importantly, social emancipation of the spectator. Deren saw the ego as being constructed by cultural processes, and the depersonalisation which she believed would occur within ritual procedure, was an emancipatory, rather than fragmentary, process. Ute Hol elucidates:

Deren understands depersonalisation not in the psychoanalytical sense of the term as decomposition or decay of the personality but, on the contrary, as growth and enlargement. This understanding is due to the fact that for her the individual is subjected to the historical development of social techniques. With the help of science and technical inventions, art must explore and simulate the conditions that produce historical subjects and their possible emancipation.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ Maya Deren, "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film" in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde* (California: University of California Press, 2001).

⁴³⁸ Ute Hol, "Moving the Dancers Souls," in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*, p. 167

Such an approach is not as peculiar as one might imagine. Graphic novelist Alan Moore, whose work is also influenced by esoteric thought, clearly demonstrates this metaphysical approach to aesthetic practice:

Kenneth Anger, somebody I've got a great deal of admiration for, he and people who are slightly affiliated with him—Maya Deren—these are sort of people who have taken the old ideas of magic and then thought, "Well why not apply them to the technology that we have now? That's all that did the previous magicians ever did." The fact that it all looks archaic to us now, that's because things WERE archaic [chuckles] in real life. If they'd had had access to printing presses, video cameras and sound recording equipment, they would have used it! I'm sure that John Dee would have released several CDs of his Enochian chorals. We have to not be locked into the past. Kenneth Anger was shrewd enough to see that film was, in its way, as any art form is, a magical technology.⁴³⁹

In the words of Rebecca Fitzgibbon: "Modern magicians use the tools of their time – video cameras, radio, television, and live events – to get their points across and do their magick. Over the course of the 20th century and beyond, film has proven itself the most powerful of modern, magickal media."⁴⁴⁰

A further example of the integration of magick and aesthetic practice is demonstrated by Anger's close associates Brion Gysin and William Burroughs. P-Orridge writes on their relationship:

By his introduction of the cut-up in all its manifestations, Gysin, the accomplished "shaman" as Burroughs so rightly designated him, gave his compadre the magical tool(s) required for a lifetime's astonishing – recorded as literature – *revelation*...I believe that a re-reading of their combined body of work from a magical perspective only confirms what

⁴³⁹ Arthur Moore, interviewed by Jay Babcock, "Magick is Afoot: A Conversation with Alan Moore about the Arts and the Occult," *Arthur Magazine*, no 4 (May 2003):

<http://www.arthurmag.com/2007/05/10/1815/>.

⁴⁴⁰ Rebecca Fitzgibbon, "Celluloid Occult," *Fortean Times*, no. 231 (January 2008): p. 17.

they themselves accepted about themselves, *that they were powerful modern magicians*.⁴⁴¹

The Ordo Templi Orientis (or OTO) was Crowley's magickal organisation, and according to an ongoing research project carried out by the Swiss social historian Peter R. Koenig, an offer was made in the Seventies "to initiate William S. Burroughs...Williams and Hyatt discussed this with Burroughs and it was decided to decline...As to Timothy Leary a similar situation arose, although Hyatt was not going to be the initiator. Leary was not interested either."⁴⁴² In illustrating this countercultural occult connection, there is one other source to which I must refer the reader; one, however, that is somewhat unverifiable and must be considered with a degree of caution. Douglas Grant, a retired section head of the occult organisation 'The International Pact of the Illuminates of Thanateros' (IOT), made the following statement to occult magazine *Ashé!*, in an article concerning Burroughs and photographic practice:

Through a mutual interest in Hassan Ibn Sabbah, contact was made with William S. Burroughs. William expressed interest in the IOT and was subsequently initiated into the IOT...William did not receive a honorary degree, he was put through an evening of ritual... inducting William into the IOT as a full member. Though it is not included in the list of items buried with William...James Grauerholz assured me that William was buried with his IOT Initiate ring.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ Genesis P-Orridge, "Magick Squares and Future Beats: The Magical Processes and Methods of William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin," in *Disinformation Guide to the Occult*, ed. Richard Metzger (New York: The Disinformation Company, 2003) p. 108.

⁴⁴² P.R. Koenig, "Phantoms of the Paradise," *The Ordo Templi Orientis Phenomenon*, <http://www.parareligion.ch/2005/phantom.htm>.

⁴⁴³ Douglas Grant, "Magick and Photography," *Ashé Journal* 2, no. 3 (2003): <http://www.ashejournal.com/index.php?id=166>.

Along with Deren, closest to Anger both conceptually and personally was Harry Smith. Smith was a formative influence upon the young Anger, after meeting him in 1941, when Anger was a teenager. Smith was also an ardent student of the teachings of Crowley; even stating, rather dubiously, that he was his son. Smith was a vitally important avant-garde filmic artist who worked primarily through the animated medium, and as such, his films are highly influential in this particular mode of filmmaking. His most overt presentation of occult themes is within his 1962 piece *No.12*, in which Qabalistic numerological forms intertwine with esoteric iconography. As is the norm with this lineage, Smith's work is characterised by sensorially immersive filmic effects. Recounting Anger's association with Smith, Landis describes how, much like Anger's film aesthetic, "the overwhelming effect of Smith's films on the viewer is a hypnotic trance induced by repeated and refracted geometric patterns and hermetic symbols."⁴⁴⁴

Practitioners such as these are direct examples of those artists who, like Anger himself, are working within the medium of film for the purposes of further metaphysical ends. The strain of visionary, spiritually inflected romantic anarchism, and the art that it produced, rose to national prominence with the onset of the psychedelic movement within the US. It is at this point that Anger's practice metamorphosed into the psychedelic aesthetic that is the most eloquent expression of his attempt to render an alterative aesthetic. As previously stated, the Beat movement was a huge influence upon the psychedelic movement; that "as it passed from an entirely underground phenomenon to a wider cultural possibility, beat quietism revealed the social possibilities of the ethic of individualism, demonstrating that the aesthetic could provide the basis for a

⁴⁴⁴ Landis, *Anger*, p. 21.

minority culture of general social potential.”⁴⁴⁵ It is the development of this culture in relation to Anger’s work that is the subject of my next chapter

⁴⁴⁵ James, *Allegories of Cinema*, p. 94.

3

Anger and the Psychedelic Discourse

To be shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception, to be shown for a few timeless hours the outer and the inner world, not as they appear to an animal obsessed with survival or to a human being obsessed with words and notions, but as they are apprehended, directly and unconditionally.⁴⁴⁶

- Aldous Huxley

To shake oneself out of a *false sense of reality* entails a *derealization* of what one falsely takes to be unreality. Only then is one able to apperceive the social phantasy system in which one is. The *normal* state of affairs is to be so immersed in one's immersion in social phantasy systems that one takes them to be real. Many images have been used to remind us of this condition. We are dead, but we are alive. We are asleep, but think we are awake. We are dreaming, but take our dreams to be reality. We are the halt, lame, blind, deaf, the sick.⁴⁴⁷

- R.D Laing

Do not adjust your minds – reality is out of focus.⁴⁴⁸

- Graffiti on lavatory wall at
University College London

Drugs and drug use are a fundamental aspect not only of Anger's films, but also of the wider counterculture of the Sixties in which he was a direct participant. After a brief tenure in France under the auspices of Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque Française and, following a long period of non-activity in filmmaking, Anger returned to the United States in the mid 1960s. This seminal era was the height of the counterculture, with this period also seeing a widespread increase in the use of

⁴⁴⁶ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (London: Vintage Books, 2004), p. 46.

⁴⁴⁷ R.D. Laing, *Self and Others* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 38.

⁴⁴⁸ Collier, *R.D. Laing*, p. 195.

psychedelic substances; particularly LSD. In his engagement with the psychedelic scene, Anger was a close associate of William Burroughs, Brion Gysin, Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, and other such luminaries of the counterculture drive; some of whom he had known before the psychedelic scene, in particular the Beats. As Anger describes, he was also “a friend in San Francisco of Owsley Stanley, the famous chemist”⁴⁴⁹ - one of the first, and certainly the most iconic, underground producers of LSD.

Anger has spoken frequently of his personal use of intoxicant substances, even going so far as to claim to have been “introduced to LSD by Aldous Huxley, a friend of my grandmother.”⁴⁵⁰ This is very hard to substantiate and seems to the present author to be another Anger falsification; one that perhaps owes something to the proposition that Aldous Huxley was introduced to Mescaline by Crowley. The latter postulation may have some degree of credibility, however, as it is well documented that they dined together in Berlin in 1930; a period in which Crowley was engaged in heavy and prolonged experimentation with a variety of drugs.⁴⁵¹ Indeed, Timothy Leary also stated that he was “an admirer of Aleister Crowley. I think that I’m carrying on the work that he started over 100 years ago.”⁴⁵² According to Robert Greenfield, one of Leary’s biographers,⁴⁵³ whilst visiting Egypt, and in great danger of being prosecuted by the authorities, Leary entered

⁴⁴⁹ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Gaspar Noé, in Alexandria Symonds, “Gaspar Noé and Kenneth Anger, In the Void Together,” *Interview Magazine* (2010): <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/blogs/film/2010-10-20/web-exclusive-gaspar-noe-kenneth-anger/>.

⁴⁵⁰ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Michael O’Pray, BFI Audio Archive (17/01/1990), National Film Theatre, Southbank, London.

⁴⁵¹ Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: Griffin, 2000), p. 355.

⁴⁵² Interview with Timothy Leary, *PBS Late-Night America* (1974): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gY3dSqs68A>. This is somewhat inaccurate, it must be said, regarding the time period Leary attributes to Crowley’s activities, yet the sentiment is clear.

⁴⁵³ Robert Greenfield, *Timothy Leary: A Biography* (Orlando: Harcourt), p. 408.

the tomb of the Great Pyramid of Egypt - an important location for Crowley's life and cosmology.

Anger presents the use of a variety of drugs by the cast within three of his films, beginning with *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954, 1958, 1966), which features the Eucharist,⁴⁵⁴ Crowley's opium pipe, and a marijuana joint; continuing with *Scorpio Rising* (1964), in Scorpio's use of methamphetamine prior to his ritualized performance, and, finally, *Invocation of my Demon Brother* (1969), which features the ritual use of marijuana. However, the intoxicant substances that have influenced Anger and his filmic aesthetic most significantly are psychedelics. Psychedelic drugs have had an impact on Anger's films not only within a representational context, but also, more importantly, on his films' intended engagement with the cinematic spectator. I argue this is part of Anger's participation in the psychedelic wing of the Sixties politics of consciousness.

(3.1) Sixties Psychedelic Society

Given that it played such a central role not only in Anger's Sixties practice, but the wider culture of which his films were a part, what exactly does the term 'psychedelic' actually mean? It is "generally defined as meaning 'generating hallucinations' and refers to distortions of perception."⁴⁵⁵ However, the signifier 'psychedelic' refers to a much wider discourse, which takes into account far more than the subjective drug experience itself. It is, in fact, directly linked with the

⁴⁵⁴ The Eucharist is a sacrament that within Crowley's system is usually an intoxicant.

⁴⁵⁵ Grunenberg, "The Politics of Ecstasy," p. 14.

multitude of notable socially progressive drives that came to define the Sixties.

Pinchbeck writes:

The ripple effect of the psychedelic journeys made by many thousands of modern people in the 1950s and 1960s cannot be extricated from other aspects of that time, such as the sexual liberation suddenly instituted by the mass production of the birth control pill or the effect that the development of electronic mass media had on the modern psyche.⁴⁵⁶

Psychedelia was one of the primary signifiers for the material socio-political conditions of the progressive elements of the Sixties. It came to represent the multitude of revolutionary facets of the time, as Curtis quite rightly illustrates: “By the late sixties the term was in everyday use and had shifted to stress the physical environment and accessories and their role in shaping experience, or even ‘anything that is visually colourful or mentally explorative’.”⁴⁵⁷ As such, “today, the term “psychedelic” may be considered ubiquitous, having filtered through pop culture into common usage over the past forty years.”⁴⁵⁸ One cannot, nor should one attempt to, remove the aesthetic productions of the period from the distinct socio-political discourses that ultimately produced them. Harris describes how “the visual arts, rock music, drug-taking, and fashions of that time – the ‘canonical’ psychedelic elements, as it were – were produced, articulated together and made meaningful within a conjecture of socio-political change and crisis.”⁴⁵⁹ As a result, “psychedelia provided a powerful expression of the sentiments of a generation in

⁴⁵⁶ Daniel Pinchbeck, “Embracing the Archaic,” in *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960s*, ed. David S. Rubin (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010) p. 51.

⁴⁵⁷ Curtis, “Building the Trip,” p. 163.

⁴⁵⁸ David Rubin, “Stimuli for a New Millennium,” in *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960s*, p. 15.

⁴⁵⁹ Harris, “Abstraction and Empathy,” p. 9.

revolt, signifying nonconformity, individuality and freedom.”⁴⁶⁰ Robert C. Morgan describes how this emergent psychedelic culture “embraced new forms of consciousness ready to grasp a future in which psychedelic drugs, open sexuality, feminism, ecology, burgeoning communication technologies (then in a nascent state), and a world without nuclear arsenals electrified the airwaves.”⁴⁶¹ As a result of this expansion of the signifier beyond the psychedelic experience, and in order to encompass the wider Sixties progressive drives, “the label ‘psychedelic style’ was formed to describe not only the flowering of a new style but a broad revolution affecting human consciousness and social interaction.”⁴⁶² However, what must be considered is that drugs were the central catalyst for the establishment and wider proliferation of the psychedelic discourse, and I would argue that they must feature in any analytical discussion of the socio-political conditions of the period. In our consideration of the political question of consciousness that I argue was a central facet of the Sixties structure of feeling, one cannot ignore what Harris describes as “a historical essentialism: that drug-taking of various creative and eclectic kinds was the defining centre of this moment of experiment in social and cultural life.”⁴⁶³ Green also argues that “in assessing the components of the counter-culture one aspect in particular demands attention. The consumption of drugs, in particular cannabis and LSD, was a vital ingredient.”⁴⁶⁴ Curtis appears to concur with this position:

The use of drugs was fundamental - and much valued as an enabling technology for making the transition from a world of hierarchies and

⁴⁶⁰ Grunenberg, foreword to *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, p. 7.

⁴⁶¹ Robert C. Morgan, “Eternal Moments: Artists who Explore The Prospect for Happiness,” in *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960s*, p. 43.

⁴⁶² Grunenberg, “The Politics of Ecstasy,” p. 17.

⁴⁶³ Harris, “Abstraction and Empathy,” p. 10.

⁴⁶⁴ Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and Counterculture* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 97.

frameworks into one of links and networks. Drugs provided revelatory experiences and rechanneled previously esoteric and exotic values, but they also tripped an awareness of the possibility of changing a world through radical social practices.⁴⁶⁵

This consideration is not always widely held, however, as Pinchbeck has described how “among the many elements that combined to catalyze the revolutionary upsurge of the 1960s, one that is often forgotten or downplayed is the psychedelic experience.”⁴⁶⁶ As such, I hope to offer a contribution to help remedy this situation.

It is important to note that the use of psychedelics is most certainly not purely a Sixties phenomenon; that “the use of nature-derived, mind-altering hallucinogenic herbs and related substances has an extensive history that goes back much further than the 1960s. Early atavistic psychedelic experiences may have occurred with the dawn of civilization among people living in Paleolithic and Neolithic tribal communities.”⁴⁶⁷ Distinct Western historical precursors to the widespread and fashionable use of drugs can be found primarily in the last century, particularly in relation to various forms of artistic mediums and the social-groupings and subcultures that surrounded the production of avant-garde art. Drug use was particularly prominent within the bohemian quarters of Paris between 1840 and 1870, and is present in the Orientalism of European tourists who travelled to the Islamic world during the latter part of the 18th century. With regard to its influence upon literature, precursors may be found in the work of German writers such as Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, and Ernst Hunger; writers who all

⁴⁶⁵ Curtis, “Building The Trip,” p. 179.

⁴⁶⁶ Pinchbeck, “Embracing the Archaic,” p. 49.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

experimented with marijuana and documented their experiences. One may also look to the ink drawings by artist and writer Henri Michaux, who wrote of his experiences of the psychedelic plant mescaline in his 1956 work “Miserable Miracle: La Mescaline”⁴⁶⁸ - a text that underwent something of a popular revival in the Sixties. The Romantic poets – Shelley, Rimbaud, etc. - also used a variety of drugs, including opium, in both their writing and general pleasure seeking. Indeed, much more could be written on the use of mind-altering substances prior to the Sixties, but that is not my concern here. My interest is in the way psychedelic substances played such a huge part in the Sixties zeitgeist.

Throughout the Western world, the widespread use of psychedelic substances in the Sixties was the result of a number of complex factors. It was the culmination of a long trend within the Twentieth-Century, as Pinchbeck describes:

During the past century, a series of seeming accidents led a number of intrepid explorers to discover the contemporary use of plant psychedelics such as peyote, psilocybin mushrooms, and ayahuasca, or *yage*, among indigenous people in South and Central America as well as ritual use of other visionary flora in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. In retrospect, perhaps these discoveries were the inevitable consequences of the process of globalization that was meshing the world together and producing new forms of knowledge as cultures crossed.⁴⁶⁹

The importance of psychedelic drugs to the Sixties lies predominantly in their role as a countercultural signifier. In the words of Green: “Drug use was as much symbolic and gestural as purely self-indulgent. The simple act of smoking a joint, so matter-of-fact today, was sufficient to render oneself an outsider, a subversive, a

⁴⁶⁸ Henri Michaux, *Miserable Miracle: La Mescaline*, trans. Louis Varèse (New York : New York Review Books, 2002).

⁴⁶⁹ Pinchbeck, “Embracing the Archaic,” p. 49.

rebel."⁴⁷⁰ Michael Rossman, of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, described how "when a young person took his first puff of psychoactive smoke, he also drew in the psychoactive culture as a whole, the entire matrix of law and association surrounding the drug, its induction and transaction."⁴⁷¹ Psychedelic drug use was itself a direct signifier of countercultural belonging; it became such a powerful and culturally resonant sign, that as a result, "since anyone *could* drop acid and tinker with their psyches, it didn't really matter if you did. A lot of people didn't and said they did, but that was cool, too. Simply knowing what tripping was, and proclaiming it an okay thing to do was sufficient to confirm one's psychedelic politics."⁴⁷²

However, as Lee and Shlain describe, it prompted a distinct questioning of the dominant value systems of the established culture:

When you smoked marijuana, you immediately became aware of the glaring contradiction between the way you experienced reality in your own body and the official descriptions by the government and the media. That pot was not the big bugaboo that it had been cracked up to be was irrefutable evidence the authorities either did not tell the truth or did not know what they were talking about. Its continued illegality was proof that lying and/or stupidity was a cornerstone of government policy. When young people got high, they knew this existentially, from the inside out. They saw through the great hoax, the cover story concerning not only the narcotics laws but the entire system. Smoking dope was thus an important political catalyst, for it enabled many a budding radical to begin questioning the official mythology of the governing class.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 97.

⁴⁷¹ Martin and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, p. 129.

⁴⁷² Hickey, "Freaks," p. 62.

⁴⁷³ Martin and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, p. 129.

Crucially, in the words of Theodore Roszack: "At the bohemian fringe of our disaffected youth culture, all roads lead to psychedelia. The fascination with hallucinogenic drugs emerges persistently as the common denominator of the many protean forms the counterculture has assumed in the post-World War II period."⁴⁷⁴ What is important – and unique – is the manner in which the widespread use of psychedelic drugs in the Sixties, particularly in America and Britain, had such a profound impact throughout culture, including aesthetic production, politics, and even critical theory.⁴⁷⁵ One may cite the nature of advanced technological society as one reason for this permeation; what Marshall McLuhan aptly termed "the global village."⁴⁷⁶ It was therefore inevitable that the introduction of LSD into the cultural arena of the US, as an easily manufactured, transportable, and powerful psychedelic substance, resulted in its widespread dissemination and pervasive influence. In emphasising the impact of LSD, one must be careful, however, not to present an image of American life prior to the introduction and widespread use of this particular psychoactive substance as a drug-free culture. In the words of David Farber:

⁴⁷⁴ Roszack, *The Making of a Counterculture*, p. 155.

⁴⁷⁵ For such an example, one may look to Michel Foucault. Hickey describes how:

Foucault's initiation into acid culture took place one night in 1975, at Zabriskie Point in the Mojave desert, in the company of Wade and a friend, while the ditties of Karlheinz Stockhausen wafted out into the desert night. For the philosopher, it was an altogether salutary experience. He saw the stars fall and the sky fold...He also claimed to have understood something about his relationship to his sister that altered his philosophical understanding of sexuality and subsequently altered his ongoing history of it. Further, although he could not have known it then, this psychedelic moment marked Foucault's introduction into a world that he had only imagined back in France – into one of those "fissures" in the filigree of power and surveillance whose existence he had theoretically extrapolated from, his reading of modern culture. Columbus could not have been more delighted at finding the Indies." (Hickey, "Freaks," p. 63)

⁴⁷⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989)

Drug use was endemic in the United States by the mid-1960s, well before any Summer of Love...In 1965, doctors wrote 123 million prescriptions for tranquilizers and 24 million prescriptions for amphetamines. Overwhelmingly, these drugs were taken by people considered normal functioning citizens...Whether mellowed out on Valium, hyped up on speed, socially drunk, or gently buzzed on nicotine, Americans in the 1960s had seemingly accepted the intoxicated state as part and parcel of the American way of life.⁴⁷⁷

What I posit as the primary reason for LSD's profound impact - contrasted with the widespread use of other drugs - is the fact that psychedelics differ fundamentally in nature from other intoxicant substances. Hickey describes how "other drugs produce intense experiences, of course, and other drug cultures produce artifacts, but none of them seduce the autonomy of the self. Consequently, they do not generate politics."⁴⁷⁸ The question naturally emerges - what was the effect of such drugs in relation to our present concerns?

Anger was directly participating in an emerging and vibrant scene of psychedelic 'psychopolitics', in which he was theoretically entrenched and geographically situated, in the Californian heart of psychedelia - San Francisco. The city was immensely important to both the psychedelic strain of the avant-garde and the culture surrounding progressive politics. In the words of Andresch Brecht: "Utopians were humored and, to some extent, even nurtured here, and it was therefore no accident that the Bay Area became the focus of much of the swirling cultural and political tumult of the 1960s."⁴⁷⁹ Anger alternated between the two capitals of Western psychedelia - California and 'swinging' London. The home of

⁴⁷⁷ David Farber, "The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture," in *Imagine Nation*, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁷⁸ Hickey, "Freaks," p. 62.

⁴⁷⁹ Andresch Brecht, "Bay Area Ecstatic," *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art* (November 14, 2010): <http://blog.sfmoma.org/2010/11/bay-area-ecstatic-2/>.

psychedelic film was, however, primarily situated in the West Coast. Anger lived in the Russian embassy building in San Francisco with Bobby Beausoleil, a musician and artist who eventually provided the soundtrack for *Lucifer Rising* (1972) whilst in jail for his part in the Manson murders.⁴⁸⁰ San Francisco is immensely important, not only to psychedelic film as a whole, but also to this specific period of Anger's practice, and so a brief contextualisation is certainly needed in order that we may understand the socio-aesthetic fluxes in which Anger was directly participating.

San Francisco was also considered the heartland of the romantic anarchist, spiritually inflected strain of the counterculture - a fact that was, in many ways, related to the emergent drug culture:

The attractions of San Francisco, with its lively art, music and literary life, and a climate that was tolerant in both a social and a meteorological sense, were a magnet for young dropouts, many of whom had no further wish from life than to laze in the sun and indulge in the open-minded drugs scene. As the waves of the new age of permissiveness swept across the world in the 1960s, San Francisco acquired a Nirvana-like reputation. The epicenter of activity was not the usual beatnik hangout, North Beach, now a site on tourist itineraries, but the district around the intersection of Haight and Ashbury Streets, to the south-west of the downtown area.⁴⁸¹

As Andresh describes, the city brought those artists "attracted to lyricism and grandiose Romanticism - those who disdained arid academic theory, and instead sought directly through their work to transform reality, to remake the world. San Francisco, even before it had cause for its reputation as America's most radical city,

⁴⁸⁰ Please see Landis, *Anger*, p. 170.

⁴⁸¹ George Perry, *San Francisco in the Sixties* (London: Pavilion Books, 2000), p 8.

captured would-be filmmakers of this type from across the country.”⁴⁸² Many of the aesthetic works produced in this area were implicitly linked with the spiritual strain of the psychedelic discourse, of which Anger was most certainly a member. In the words of Andresh: “The film culture that evolved here in fits and starts, and fully flowered in the ’60s, was, above all, a spiritually oriented cinema with the intuitive aim of bringing humans into contact with the totality of their being.”⁴⁸³ Andresh describes how “the San Francisco Bay Area has for decades been the epicenter of a branch of mystically inclined experimental filmmaking that seeks to induce ecstasy in viewers.”⁴⁸⁴

This particular strain of filmmaking was participating directly in the burgeoning formation of psychedelic art as an aesthetic category. As previously stated, psychedelic art is a sorely under-researched area of aesthetics. Grunenberg accurately describes how “tainted by its incestuous relationship with popular culture, low art, and entertainment, psychedelic art has been not only neglected but virtually excluded from the serious histories of the sixties.”⁴⁸⁵ Grunenberg outlines what he considers the reasons for this neglect:

We are dealing with an aesthetic which has generally been relegated to the realm of applied art, bad taste and stylistic aberration, obscured by an art-historically and institutionally sanctioned view of the period which has positioned the aesthetically and conceptually purified statements of Pop, minimal and conceptual art at the centre. There seems to be deep-seated suspicion towards psychedelic art's formal exuberance and its suspicious proximity to popular culture, suggesting the continuing domination of high-modernist and formalist principles.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸² Andresh, “Bay Area Ecstatic.”

⁴⁸³ Andresh, “Bay Area Ecstatic.”

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Grunenberg, foreword to *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, p. 7.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., p 13.

Dave Hickey has suggested that psychedelic art, along with styles such as “Pre-Raphaelite, Art Nouveau, Pop, Populuxe...Las Vegas, and wild-style Graffiti,”⁴⁸⁷ is ‘anti-academic’. Psychedelic art, according to Hickey, is part of a collection of styles that been “*permanently* out of academic fashion for nearly three hundred years.”⁴⁸⁸ The reasons Hickey gives for their exclusion from popular academic consideration are their emphasis upon “complexity over simplicity, pattern over form, repetition over composition, feminine over masculine, curvilinear over rectilinear, and the fractal, the differential, and the chaotic over Euclidean order.”⁴⁸⁹ Matthew Poirier also offers an important consideration to be borne in mind regarding the legality of the psychedelic experience, with which such art bears close association. He writes: “It seems that works that brought about changes in perception beyond the ordinary have been confused with publicly condemned drugs such as mescaline and LSD, and psychedelic art is thus seen as an apology for them.”⁴⁹⁰ Psychedelic art has an unresolved and complicated relationship to classical forms of art-history. Despite this, Grunenberg attempts to locate psychedelic art within the pantheon of conventional art-history, describing it as “a visionary art in the best tradition of Hieronymus Bosch, William Blake, *fin de siècle* Symbolism, Surrealism and certain types of so called “Outsider” art. It opens the doors to new universes, captures the flight of the imagination and often has a deeply mystical and religious quality.”⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁷ Hickey, “Freaks,” p. 64.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Hickey, “Freaks,” p. 64.

⁴⁹⁰ Matthieu Poirier, “Hyper-Optical and Kinetic Stimulation, Happenings, and Films in France,” in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, p. 281.

⁴⁹¹ Grunenberg, “The Politics of Ecstasy,” pp. 16-17.

The neglect of this subject has resulted in a very closed and conservative approach, with little, if any, consideration given to the discourses that animated the production of such art. As Rubin points out:

The psychedelic era, in essence, is now viewed as a historical time zone, and exhibitions exploring the art of the period have occasionally surfaced over the past decade, most of which have concentrated on consumer products such as poster and album-cover art. Only a few of these projects, however, have attempted to investigate the notion of a psychedelic sensibility within the context of contemporary art.⁴⁹²

As one of the curators of the 'Summer of Love' exhibition at the Tate Modern, Grunenberg argues the case for psychedelia's inclusion in art history:

Psychedelia had a pervasive impact on major artists and avant-garde movements of the period....Like Vienna at the turn of the century or Berlin in the 1920s, the 1960s were one of those rare moments in history when art, politics and cultural circumstances coalesced to create a favourable environment of imagination, experimentation and commitment. This concentrated outburst of creativity saw not only a new style evolving in the visual arts, music, film, poetry and literature but also the rise of new platforms of communication and interaction, ranging from the underground press to contemporary art galleries, pirate radio stations, community television, neighbourhood associations and political protest groups.⁴⁹³

San Francisco produced many of the distinctive psychedelic films of the Sixties. Bruce Conner's *Looking For Mushrooms* (original version, 1959–67) is a central, yet somewhat overlooked work of Sixties psychedelic film. In 1962, Conner left San Francisco and moved to Mexico, where he spent about a year, before returning to the Bay Area. Whilst in Mexico, Conner shot footage of himself mushroom hunting

⁴⁹² David S. Rubin, "Stimuli For a New Millennium," in *Psychedelic and Optical Art*, p. 15

⁴⁹³ Grunenberg, "The Politics of Ecstasy," p. 12.

with Timothy Leary, who was also visiting the country. The subsequent film was culled from the footage shot in Mexico and combined with earlier footage shot in San Francisco. In 1967 he added a soundtrack, The Beatles' song 'Tomorrow Never Knows' - an iconic psychedelic track which contains lyrics from Leary, Alpert, and Metzner's seminal Sixties text *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*.⁴⁹⁴

Storm de Hirsch - a widely undervalued experimental filmmaker - made one of the first psychedelic films of the Sixties with her 1965 work *Peyote Queen*. Hirsch's *Third Eye Butterfly* (1968) - the title again suggestive of the influence of mysticism, in particular Hindu doctrine - followed much the same pattern of psychedelic concern. San Franciscan artist Lawrence Jordan's 1958 work *Triptych in Four Parts*, begins as a portrait of the San Francisco circle of artists and poets John Reed, Wallace, Shirley, Tosh Berman, Michael McClure and Philip Lamantia, but swiftly evolves into a documentation of the artists going "in search of psychedelic experience and religious epiphany in the peyote grounds of deepest Texas."⁴⁹⁵ Along with such film practice, multi-media artists such as Jackie Cassen, Rudi Stern, Don Snyder, and the USCO group, created installations that used films, slide projections, music, dancers, stroboscopes, and sound-art to create immersive environments aimed at sensory overload.

⁴⁹⁴ Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, and Ralph Metzner, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Broadside, 1996).

⁴⁹⁵ "BFI's Midsummer Psych-Out," *Retro A Go: Guide to All Things Retro*, <http://www.retroto.com/2008/06/bfis-midsummer.html>.

Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954, 1958, 1966) is widely recognised as "one of the first 'head movies'."⁴⁹⁶ The film was initially shot in 1954, but subsequently underwent a number of alterations. The original version, which was never screened publicly, had a soundtrack by avant-garde composer Harry Partch,⁴⁹⁷ while the first version publicly screened featured a soundtrack of the 'Glagolithic Mass' by Leos Janacek. A 1958 version was projected onto three cinema screens using three simultaneous projectors. What may be considered the most complex version, *The Sacred Mushroom Edition (Lord Shiva's Dream)*, was completed in 1966, at the height of psychedelia. It is this definitive version which is in circulation as part of Anger's 'Magick Lantern Cycle'.⁴⁹⁸ Exceedingly complex layers of superimposition were added to this version, with additional footage from Harry Lachman's *Dante's Inferno* (1935). The 1966 alterations resulted in the most fully realised version of the work, with the timely changes being highly indicative of the much wider socio-political fluxes in which Anger was engaged.

In 1966, the film "enjoyed a psychedelic revival...with ads exhorting patrons to drop your acid and see the movie."⁴⁹⁹ In the 1966 film screenings of *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, Anger included two intermission periods during which the following instructions were projected onto the cinema screen: "Psychedelic

⁴⁹⁶ Landis, *Anger*, p. 80. Please also see Stevenson, *Addicted: The Myth and Menace of Drugs in Film* (London: Creation Books, 2000).

⁴⁹⁷ Partch was a revered American avant-garde composer who utilised a multitude of unconventional instruments – which he constructed himself – in his compositions. Anger cut the film to Partch's music, yet Partch refused to allow Anger to release it. Despite interventions by Anais Nin and Stan Brakhage, Partch steadfastly refused to be associated with the film. Brakhage later described the situation to Scott McDonald: "I was involved in the attempts that Kenneth made to have Harry Partch do the sound track for *Inauguration*. But Harry was just so offended by the movie." Scott MacDonald *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Temple University Press, 2002), pp. 227 – 234.

⁴⁹⁸ The Magic Lantern Cycle is the collection of films that Anger has released into the public domain. Please see Filmography.

⁴⁹⁹ Landis, *Anger*, p. 131.

researchers desirous to Turn On for Pleasure Dome should absorb their ice cubes at this point,” followed by: “Psychedelic researchers preparing for Pleasure Dome should remain seated during this intermission. The following film should, under ideal circumstances, be experienced in that Holy trance called High.”⁵⁰⁰ The work is based upon one of Crowley’s religious rituals, in which the ‘Eucharist’ depicted within the film is a hallucinogenic drug, immediately setting the psychedelic tone.

In Anger’s own words, the film is

derived from one of Crowley’s dramatic rituals where people in the cult assume the identity of a god or goddess. In other words, it’s the equivalent of a masquerade party - they plan this for a whole year and on All Sabbaths Eve they come as the gods and goddesses that they have identified with and the whole thing is like an improvised happening. This is the actual thing the film is based on. In which the gods and goddesses interact and in *Inauguration Of The Pleasure Dome* it’s the legend of Bacchus that’s the pivotal thing and it ends with the God being torn to pieces by the Bacchantes. This is the underlying thing. But rather than using a specific ritual, which would entail quite a lot of the spoken word as ritual does, I wanted to create a feeling of being carried into a world of wonder. And the use of color and phantasy is progressive; in other words, it expands, it becomes completely subjective – like when people take communion, and one sees it through their eyes.⁵⁰¹

The idea for the film emerged from a fancy dress party that Anger attended at Samson De Brier’s house in 1954, when the guests were asked to “Come As Your Madness.”⁵⁰² The assortment of guests - who ended up featuring in the film - included a variety of bohemian artists and filmmakers, including Anais Nin, Marjorie Cameron, and Curtis Harrington. The work is a complex piece that is rather long by Anger’s standards (42 minutes), and flows through various

⁵⁰⁰ Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 156.

⁵⁰¹ Anger, quoted in Powell, “The Occult: A Torch For Lucifer,” p. 69.

⁵⁰² Landis, *Anger*, p. 73.

changing moods. It depicts a party attended by various characters from mythology - Lord Shiva, Osiris, Astarte, Pan, The Great Beast and The Scarlett Woman from Crowley's cosmology, along with 'Cesare the Somnambulist' from Robert Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). Importantly, Bacchus - the Roman god of intoxication - is central.

Beginning at a slow pace, the characters are gradually introduced, with the film then moving into an increasing delirium of hallucinogenic form, with superimpositions being utilised as the primary method of engineering the psychedelic aesthetic, creating a confutation of ever-shifting forms. The images move between almost abstract masses of colour and more discernable forms, creating a confusing composition of trail-laden images. As Anger states, "when you're on LSD you get layers and layers of vision, and things superimpose. I tried to recreate that by superimpositions and layers of film."⁵⁰³ Superimpositions are particularly important for Anger, as the technique is specifically related to his attempt to create a psychedelically transformative cinematic aesthetic. Jonas Mekas writes:

The cinema of superimpositions is created by people whose perception - by whatever process - has been expanded, intensified (Brakhage is opposed to the use of drugs for the expansion of the mind and the eye's consciousness). Their images are loaded with double and triple superimpositions. Things must happen fast, many things. Lines, colours, figures, one on top of another, combinations and possibilities, to keep the eye working.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰³ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Michael O'Pray, BFI Audio Archive (17/01/1990), National Film Theatre, Southbank, London.

⁵⁰⁴ Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal: On *Lantern Magica*, Superimpositions, and Movies Under Drugs," *Village Voice*, August 27, 1964; reprinted in Mekas, *Movie Journal*, p. 158, quoted in Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, p. 241.

In psychedelic art, one would assume there is a direct correlation between the drug experience and the work produced. However, the nature of psychedelic art in relation to the psychedelic experience is more complicated than one might first imagine. It appears that there are numerous sub-categories of such forms; art that is directly informed by the psychedelic experience; art that attempts to induce something akin to the experience itself; art that attempts to convey the insights gained from the experience, and, finally, art that simply attempts to adhere to what may loosely be defined as the 'psychedelic style'. It seems that, "just as there are two kinds of Christian art, that which through its iconology and symbolism visually states Christian themes, and that which dramatizes what Christianity means to man and how its conception heightens human experience, so psychedelic art is divided."⁵⁰⁵ Masters delves further into the issue, by arguing that most psychedelic art

seeks to re-create psychedelic experience. This art, by creating situations of sensory overload, visual distortions, illogical symbolism, simultaneous image effects, the feeling of being inside one's body, and a preoccupation with themes of conception, cosmic forces, and the mysterious movements of an unknown nature, strives to introduce some of the more familiar and overt manifestations of psychedelic experience in the viewer.⁵⁰⁶

The dominant trend within psychedelic art seems to be based upon a desire to induce an experiential condition approaching the state itself, even if it is only "to convey the essence or insight derived from the psychedelic experience."⁵⁰⁷ It seems that within psychedelic art, "optical effects are both produced in response to

⁵⁰⁵ Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, *Psychedelic Art* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) p. 153.

⁵⁰⁶ Masters and Houston, *Psychedelic Art*, p. 153.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

the visual and visionary experience of altered states of consciousness and used to achieve them.”⁵⁰⁸ As a result of this aim, the art produced was particularly revolutionary in that it “not only recorded, documented, made visible and interpreted intoxicating drug experiences but also took on a role seldom assigned to creative products: to serve as a sensual catalyst in the evocation of fantastic, mind-expanding visions.”⁵⁰⁹

Writing on the psychedelic moving-image art that followed this particular tract, Masters describes how “such films as these not only may describe psychedelic experience: they also may expand, deepen, and otherwise alter the awareness of the viewer. They do not give a psychedelic experience—something no art form has yet come close to doing—but they effect changes in consciousness at the same time that they elicit a positive aesthetic response.”⁵¹⁰ Anger’s work is precisely this - an aesthetic vehicle for the attempted inducement of an experiential quality approaching the psychedelic experience, and his work’s formal qualities are directly informed by this desire to engineer an environment that is conducive to obtaining an altered state of consciousness. Such an aim is not without its critics, however, as Masters shows:

With some artists, there seems to be the questionable assumption that it is desirable to induce altered states in the viewer—just to change consciousness, as a worthwhile end in itself. This we are inclined to reject as directionless escapism. When, as is frequent, a similar approach is made to the psychedelic experience, the induced awareness will be at best of a trivial nature.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁸ James, *Allegories of Cinema*, p. 128.

⁵⁰⁹ Grunenberg, “The Politics of Ecstasy,” p. 18.

⁵¹⁰ Masters and Houston, *Psychedelic Art*, p. 82.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

However, perhaps in a more pertinent criticism, Masters raises an ethical issue for consideration - that "playing on the human nervous system is not without its dangers. As techniques are perfected, what is certainly a major art form of the future could emerge just as well as a brain-washing nightmare."⁵¹²

Contrary to what Masters states, it appears that such an alteration of consciousness has a far more significant motivation than just a worthwhile aim in itself. As Grinspoon and Bakalar describe, aesthetic psychedelic processes are used "to overwhelm the senses and derange habitual modes of perception."⁵¹³ This particular strain of Sixties film - of which Anger's work is an explicit example - was developed with the intention of not just celebrating the psychedelic experience, but creating as close an approximation as one could to the experience itself; crucially, in order to effect some degree of psychical liberation of the subject, however fleeting this may be. They are works that "by staying in tune with the psychedelic experience, attempt to cross the sensory threshold and generate a profound disturbance of everyday consciousness and perception."⁵¹⁴ In this breaking down of habitual modes of perception, the aim is to obtain - in a particular Sixties manner - a state of authenticity. As Banes states of Sixties avant-garde film: "The visual intricacies of film (like the superimpositions favored by Brakhage, Anger, Rice, and others) were thought to provide a pathway to authentic experience."⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² Masters and Houston, *Psychedelic Art*, p. 85.

⁵¹³ Lester Grinspoon, and James B. Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 74.

⁵¹⁴ Masters and Houston, *Psychedelic Art*, p. 153.

⁵¹⁵ Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, p. 244.

Despite the occasionally sublime form that can be found in his films, Anger predominantly does not offer the viewer a 'transformative' experience through meditative serenity; his aesthetic is predominately one of sensorial excess. Anger's 'magickal motto' is "Force and Fire,"⁵¹⁶ which eloquently describes his methodology of attempting to burn away the vicissitudes of the inauthentic self, in order that a more fundamental modality of existence can be found. This particular tract implicitly informs his approach toward filmmaking and the manner in which he attempts to construct an environment conducive to subjective alteration - be that interpreted in a spiritual/secular fashion, or from a modernist/postmodernist perspective; not that such divisions are connected, of course.

Jonas Mekas, after visiting some multi-media performances, stated:

There are moments...when I feel I am witnessing the beginnings of new religions, that I find myself in religious, mystical environments where the ceremonials and music and body movements and the symbolism of lights and colors are being discovered and explored. The very people who come to these shows have all something of a religious bond between them. Something is happening and is happening fast—and it has something to do with light, it has everything to do with light—and everybody feels it and is in waiting— often, desperately.⁵¹⁷

Within this spiritually inflected psychedelic strain, Anger shares many affinities with his old friend Jodorowski.⁵¹⁸ In Jodorowski words, "I want to make (film) LSD but not give the image of LSD" - that "film is the pill."⁵¹⁹ Despite his antipathy towards drugs, Brakhage was a huge influence upon the psychedelic aesthetic in

⁵¹⁶ Please see Appendix.

⁵¹⁷ Jonas Mekas, *The Village Voice*, quoted in Masters and Huston, *Psychedelic Art*, p. 126.

⁵¹⁸ Despite their numerous fallings out over the years, they have remained friends.

⁵¹⁹ Alejandro Jodorowski, quoted in Ben Cobb, *Anarchy and Alchemy*, p. 270.

Sixties film. When considering the metaphysical intent that informed his practice, Brakhage can be seen, along with Anger, as one the most influential and appropriate examples of those working within the romantic anarchist spiritual strain of the avant-garde.

(3.2) Psychedelic Theory

Given that psychedelics played such an important role in the politics of consciousness of the Sixties, it is important to look at the effect of such substances upon the psyche. Literature on this subject is extremely broad, with accounts varying greatly. Due to the complex, and as some may argue, pre-linguistic nature of the psychedelic experience, such accounts are inevitably fraught with difficulty. Hickey writes of “the futility of trying to verbalize the lascivious intensity of such experiences on the page. One just *knows*, as certainly as one knows anything, that recasting those folding, psychedelic moments in words simply undoes what the chemicals have done — but writers can't not try.”⁵²⁰ As Harris also points out, “something central to psychedelia understood as a campaign for experiential rush of one kind or another necessarily offers a powerful recalcitrance to literal and metaphorical post-coital or post-prandial deliberations.”⁵²¹ That ultimately, “there can be no direct ex post facto knowledge of psychedelia’s experiences...[They] necessarily retain their obscurities as ‘lived experience’.”⁵²² However, for any kind of valid discourse to emerge, we must, as Hickey states, at least try.

⁵²⁰ Hickey, “Freaks,” p. 62.

⁵²¹ Harris, “Abstraction and Empathy,” p. 10.

⁵²² Ibid., p. 11.

In doing so, there are specific commonalities that can be identified amongst the accounts given by users of the drugs. Grunenberg describes how “the chemical effects of LSD and other hallucinogens generate certain experiential patterns and shared sensual states. In varying degrees, psychedelics radically affect the perception of the self, one's body and the surrounding environment, leading to hallucinations and inward journeys into fantastical and imaginary realms.”⁵²³

Fuller also writes on commonalities found in the experience:

The verbal reports given by individuals who had undergone a session with LSD contained certain common themes: changes in visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic perception; changes in experiencing space and time; greatly enhanced awareness of color; changes in body image; enhanced recall or memory; ego dissolution; and magnification of character traits (especially those revealing classic psychoanalytical themes).⁵²⁴

Masters and Houston, in their groundbreaking study *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, describe some of these effects as “a variety of hallucinations, delusions, abnormal body sensations, ego disturbances (depersonalisation, derealization, deanimation), time and space distortions, and other deviations from normal consciousness.”⁵²⁵ In Leary's words: “The psychedelic experience provide ecstatic moments which dwarf any personal or cultural game. Pure sensation can capture awareness. Interpersonal intimacy reaches Himalayan heights. Aesthetic delights - musical, artistic, botanical, natural - are raised to the millionth power.”⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Grunenberg, “The Politics of Ecstasy,” p. 16.

⁵²⁴ Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven*, p. 64.

⁵²⁵ Masters and Huston, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* (Holt: Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 52

⁵²⁶ Timothy Leary, *Your Brain is God* (Berkeley: Ronin, 2001) p. 59.

Despite their initial usefulness for conveying the specific qualities of the psychedelic experience, these remain perhaps rather vague accounts, and so, in order to gain a more in-depth analysis, we must look to critical theory. In doing so, we may note that there is a surprising lack of writing concerning drugs within the academic arena. This may be due in part to the illegality of the substances; it may also be due to the prevalence of New-Age writing on the subject, and its reduction into pop-psychology and mythology. Yet, despite the domination of New-Age modes of writing on the subject of psychedelics, I feel there is a strong case for serious critical analysis. While I do not wish to dwell too long on this issue, I think it is important to outline some of the voices that have emerged within this area which are vital to this current study. This exposition is certainly not exhaustive, but do I wish to detail those accounts that have direct relevance to my concern with the politics of consciousness of the Sixties. However, what I do not wish to offer, importantly, is a phenomenological exploration of the psychedelic drug experience. Whilst such an endeavour is immensely valid, it would be superfluous to our concerns, since, as stated, this work is concerned with the socio-political domain of Anger's aesthetic practice, rather than an investigation into the psychedelic experience, relative to either art or drugs. However, I do believe it is beneficial to identify those interpretations of the psychedelic experience that were integral to the Sixties counterculture's discourse on the subject (which is very much my concern here), given that this psychedelic discourse has impacted so profoundly upon Anger's aesthetic practice.

Dave Hickey has offered some speculation on the experiential nature of psychedelics, in an approach that is marked by Lacanian theory:

Psychedelics, I think, disconnect both the signifier and the signified from their purported referents in the phenomenal world - simultaneously bestowing upon us a visceral insight into the cultural mechanics of language, and a terrifying inference of the tumultuous nature that swirls beyond it...a vertiginous glimpse into the abyss that divides the world from our knowing of it...Because it is one thing to believe, on theoretical evidence, that we live in the prison-house of language. It is quite another to know it, to actually peek into the slippery emptiness as the Bastille explodes around you.⁵²⁷

Deleuze and Guattari's work - particularly *A Thousand Plateaus*⁵²⁸ - is markedly influenced by writings on intoxicant substances. Plant elucidates: "As Deleuze and Guattari developed their onslaught on modernity's categorized, classified world, with its Oedipalized, well organized individuals and its belief in the importance of its own ideas, it was modernity's long years of drug experiments from which their drew some of their most incisive lines of thought."⁵²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari argue that drugs may offer "a line of perceptive causality that makes it so that (1) the imperceptible is perceived; (2) perception is molecular; (3) desire directly invests the perception and the perceived. The Americans of the beat generation had already embarked on this path, and spoke of a molecular revolution specific to drugs."⁵³⁰ Given that part of Deleuze and Guattari's project was to bring perceptual acuity to the molecular level, beyond (or more accurately, beneath) representation itself, psychedelics appear to offer a direct experiential insight into

⁵²⁷ Hickey, "Freaks," p. 64.

⁵²⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brain Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004).

⁵²⁹ Sadie Plant, *Writing on Drugs* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 131.

⁵³⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 313 - 314.

this condition. Manuel DeLanda, one of the foremost interpreters of Deleuze's thought, by his own admission periodically takes psychedelics and interprets the experience thus:

When you trip, you liquefy structures in your brain, linguistic structures, intentional structures. They acquire a less viscous consistency, and your brain becomes a super-computer. You are able to think concepts you were not able to think before. Information rushes in your brain, which makes you feel like you're having a revelation. But of course no one is revealing anything to you. It's just self-organizing. It's happening by itself.⁵³¹

Perhaps the most incisive lines of thought during the Sixties on the subject of psychedelics emerged from psychoanalysis and its attendant discourses. The majority of psychoanalytic interpretations of the psychedelic experience revolved around the proposition that saw psychedelics as “a way of tuning into the ‘higher’ energies of the unconscious.”⁵³² This proposition forms the crux of this particular mode of interpretation (although there are subtle variations from school to school).⁵³³ When LSD was first synthesized by the chemist Albert Hoffman in 1943, it was initially used within a therapeutic framework for treating a variety of mental disorders. The history of LSD is exceedingly complex, and I can only refer the reader to certain relevant literature for much fuller expositions than space

⁵³¹ Manuel DeLanda, quoted in Erik Davis, “DeLanda Destratified: Observing the Liquefaction of Manuel DeLanda,” *Mondo Magazine*. <http://www.techgnosis.com/DeLanda.html>.

⁵³² Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven*, p. 72.

⁵³³ One excellent study of the psychedelic experience within a psychoanalytic framework is offered by Dan Merkur in his work *The Ecstatic Imagination: Psychedelic Experiences and the Psychoanalysis of Self-Actualisation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). The approach that Merkur adopts is that of a synthesis of the major schools of psychoanalytic theory, with particular emphasis being placed upon the Freudian notion of phantasy. Another authority on psychedelics within the psychoanalytic domain is Stanislav Grof. Grof has been one of the foremost authorities on psychedelics since the Sixties. As a psychiatrist Grof has conducted hundreds of experiments with LSD and has published more documentation on the subject than anyone, inside or outside, the medical quarter. Grof works within a very particular Jung/Freud synthesis as his interpretive framework for dealing with such phenomena. Following Jung's metaphysical lead, Grof argues that psychedelics possess the capacity to induce an experience of the numinous.

permits.⁵³⁴ Yet, what is important for my current study is that within the realm of medical psychology, LSD was widely thought to bypass rational systemisation and engage in a direct dialogue with the unconscious. This is directly demonstrated in what was called the 'psycholytic' approach to LSD therapy, which used the drug as a facilitator in accessing the analysand's unconscious material.

With regard to the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who informed so much of Sixties countercultural thought - R.D. Laing - we find that his opinion on the subject of psychedelics correlates directly with the wider structure of feeling of the Sixties. Laing was fundamentally important to the psychedelic underground of the US and UK. Timothy Leary - the individual who is often held to be the figurehead of the psychedelic movement due to his tireless self-promotion and media engagement - upon first meeting Laing was "bowled over by the turned-on, wry Scottish Shaman...in Leary's opinion Laing was the most fascinating man on the planet."⁵³⁵ As Melechi describes, Laing's "politics of alterity found a ready audience in the psychedelic underground, who adopted Laing as guide for their collective journey into inner consciousness."⁵³⁶ After Laing's "first experience with mescaline, which proved even more powerful than LSD, he introduced it to Alexander Trocchi, the Glaswegian poet, novelist, and former Situationist. Laing's relationship with Trocchi took him to the heart of the 1960s drug culture."⁵³⁷ I am not the first to propose Laing as the theoretical patriarch of the Sixties psychedelic movement. One scholar who has directly linked Laing with the psychedelic underground in her

⁵³⁴ Please see Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), and Lee A. Martin and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992).

⁵³⁵ Melechi, "Drugs of Liberation," 43.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

own critical appraisal is Nannette Aldred, who argued in her particular analysis of Sixties culture, that “psychedelia here is concerned with a frame of mind – a questioning of identity and representation, informed by the ideas of R.D. Laing and others associated with the anti-psychiatry movement.”⁵³⁸ For Lachman also, “Laing was the undisputed guru of the British counterculture.”⁵³⁹ Melechi describes how “with Trocchi and William Burroughs, Laing began to collaborate on a book on drugs and creativity, *Drugs of the Mind*, which never progressed beyond lengthy discussion.”⁵⁴⁰ Robert Hewison has described this as “one of the unwritten books of the Sixties.”⁵⁴¹

In January 1966, Laing gave a lecture entitled “The Phenomenology of Hashish, Mescaline, and LSD” to large gathering of psychiatrists at The London Hospital. He also presented his thoughts to the arts-community of London at the Institute of the Contemporary Arts, with a paper entitled “The Experience of LSD.”⁵⁴² Laing’s analysis is classic zeitgeist thinking surrounding the nature of the experience, and provides an eloquent reading of Sixties thought concerning psychedelia:

We’ll presume that the ego is a very small part of what we potentially can experience, and that in order to fit into other people’s aims, that is, to social reality, our egos have become very small indeed. And the relevance of drugs is that they release the person from being as it were imprisoned inside the ego...what it seems to open out is a sort of relatively undifferentiated matrix of experience which is perhaps comparable to the way a child experiences itself in the first few months of life...There’s a tremendous need to get out of this alienated little ego

⁵³⁸ Nannette Aldred, “The Summer of Love in Performance and Sgt. Pepper,” in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture*, p. 101.

⁵³⁹ Gary Lachman, *Turn off your Mind*, p. 349.

⁵⁴⁰ Melechi, “Drugs of Liberation,” p. 42.

⁵⁴¹ Hewison, *Too Much*, p. 128.

⁵⁴² Please see Melechi, “Drugs of Liberation,” p. 45.

here, and if the people don't do it by flipping out into a psychotic state, a lot of people try to do so by means of drugs.⁵⁴³

In the above statement we have all the hallmarks of the Sixties politics of consciousness - conditioning that arises from power structures; general subjectivity as a state of alienation; authentic existence as akin to the epistemology of childhood, and the similarity between psychosis and the LSD experience (the latter two points are explored in due course). Whilst the various accounts I have briefly outlined are taken from different schools, a distinct commonality runs throughout, and is integral to this inquiry. The theme that links the aforementioned interpretations of the psychedelic experience directly ties in with a central facet of the Sixties politics of consciousness - the premise that such substances prompt a form of experiential release from general modes of consciousness. This may be a fleeting experience - as in the model outlined by Hickey regarding the detachment of signifier from signified - or, as in the proposition outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, the direct bypassing of representational perception to the awareness of the molecular level. Yet the interpretations agree that the experience may be deemed as being prior to the general consensus of what constitutes 'normal' - or hegemonic, or standardised - modalities of consciousness, in which we engage in so much of lived experience. This is the 'deconditioning model' - a central idea in Sixties psychedelia, and indeed in the wider politics of consciousness of the Sixties.

⁵⁴³ Unpublished interview with R.D Laing (Loveday Drug Books, 1965), quoted in Melechi, *Psychedelia Britannica*, pp. 45- 46.

(3.3) Sixties 'Deconditioning'

Allen states that "all the psychedelic or 'mind-manifesting' drugs attack the defense of compartmentalization and thus make it possible for an individual to see through some of the absurdities, including status systems, of his own behavior, and of his own culture and groups-of-reference."⁵⁴⁴ As Pinchbeck aptly summarises, within such a model the psychedelic experience "can lead to a profound sense of deconditioning - the realization that our social world and built environment are artificial constructs; transitional templates, that everything we take as certain could be entirely and imminently otherwise."⁵⁴⁵ As previously stated, this is probably a utopian ideal, yet its central importance to the politics of consciousness of the Sixties remains. Martin and Barresi offer a statement that aptly summarises the approach taken by subversive movements of the counterculture of the Sixties: "Rather than a basis on which a view of the world, but particularly of the relations between self and other, could be securely constructed, it became commonplace to suppose that immediate experience must be understood as a product of social and historical influences and may need to be cleansed of its misleading or enslaving accretions."⁵⁴⁶

The process of 'deconditioning' was a central theme in the Sixties psychedelic counterculture. Braunstein aptly describes this particular Sixties thematic: "To rid oneself of the drives that produced aggression, authoritarianism, sexism, racism, intolerance, and sexual repression, counterculturalists sought to disinherit

⁵⁴⁴ Joe K. Adams, "Psychosis: Experimental and Real," in *The Psychedelic Review* 1, No. 4, (Cambridge, 1964): <http://www.psychedelic-library.org/adams.htm>.

⁵⁴⁵ Pinchbeck, "Embracing the Archaic," p. 52.

⁵⁴⁶ Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 230.

pernicious social conditioning through a process alternately dubbed 'deschooling,' 'reimprinting,' or "deconditioning'."⁵⁴⁷ Such terms were used throughout the Sixties as a rallying cry to children of the counterculture. For the romantic anarchist strain, the emphasis was always upon personal transformation, and the first step in such a process was 'unlearning' all that was detrimental to authentic existence. Goffman elucidates: "Many counterculturalists, especially those who lean toward the 'human potential' category, are obsessed with the idea that people need to be deprogrammed or debrainwashed from the inherited precepts of their culture."⁵⁴⁸ He describes how "a particular hard-core dilation of this notion posits that we are all sleepwalking through life, and desperate measures are required to wake us up. James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, G.I. Gurdjieff, Aleister Crowley, and Timothy Leary are among the twentieth century thinkers who employed the 'sleepwalker' trope."⁵⁴⁹ For Goffman, "this is a project now associated with the likes of Georges Gurdjieff, Aleister Crowley, R.D. Laing, William S. Burroughs, and Genesis P-Orridge."⁵⁵⁰ As stated, Anger's films are ultimately concerned with psychical transformation and, being in the psychedelic vein, they attempt to do so by offering something approaching a psychedelic experience; perhaps even a transitory sense of deconditioning, in which the 'false self' is temporarily displaced. It is crucial to emphasise that such processes were ultimately concerned with a change in subjectivity from the 'normal', acclimatised state, in which individuals engage in lived experience.

⁵⁴⁷ Braunstein and Doyle, "Conditioning," in *Imagine Nation*, p. 15.

⁵⁴⁸ Goffman and Joy, *Counterculture Through the Ages*, p. 110

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Goffman and Joy, *Counterculture Through the Ages*, p 52.

The deconditioning model was expressed forcefully by Laing within Sixties discourse. Daniel Burston describes how Laing construed “normality as a kind of deficiency disease – one characterised by a lack of authenticity and/or access to the deeper level of the psyche (that is, the primitive and the sublime), which are integral to the wholeness of human experience.”⁵⁵¹ Laing states in *The Politics of Experience*: “I would wish to emphasise that our ‘normal’, ‘adjusted’ state is too often the abdication of ecstasy, the betrayal of our true potentialities, that many of us are only too successful in acquiring a false self to adapt the false realities.”⁵⁵² That fundamentally, “the fabric of these socially shared hallucinations is what we call reality, and our collective madness is what we call sanity.”⁵⁵³ In the words of Burston: “Laing held that the pseudo-sanity of the normal person entails a progressive attenuation of authenticity, which erodes his or her critical faculty and openness to transcendental experience. True sanity, he said, involves the dissolution of the normally adjusted ego which he equated with the false self.”⁵⁵⁴ For Laing, conventional modes of consciousness are “radically estranged from the structure of being.”⁵⁵⁵

Austin describes how a primary concern of the children of the counterculture was undertaking “individual or small-group projects aimed stripping away their own past socialisations and conditioning, and permanently remove themselves from the everyday concerns of the status quo. The de-socialisation process could take any of several routes, or combinations of routes, but the use of psychedelic drugs was

⁵⁵¹ Daniel Burston, *The Crucible of Experience: R.D. Laing and Crisis of Psychotherapy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 103.

⁵⁵² Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, p. 48.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Burston, *The Crucible of Experience*, p. 106.

⁵⁵⁵ Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, p. 24.

the easiest, the quickest, and probably the most popular and enjoyable.”⁵⁵⁶ As Braunstein and Doyle describe, “high-test hallucinogens like LSD or mellow mood-altering substances like marijuana soon became the deconditioning tools of choice for a large segment of the counterculture.”⁵⁵⁷ Echoing the deconditioning thematic, Morgan writes: “Drugs provided an opening to the countercultural epistemology, an intense, spontaneous kind of deconditioning that opened one’s senses to a different reality, or a different awareness of reality.”⁵⁵⁸ Although writing on the literary medium, Sherry Turkle situates this Sixties approach in relation to other movements throughout history, when she states how

using a new kind of discourse to break the reader’s usual “set” is not an uncommon strategy for subversive intellectual movements of the twentieth century. It characterizes the work of Wittgenstein, Joyce, and the surrealists, as well as that of Lacan. In each of these cases, the text is not there simply to transmit content or to convince you of an argument, it is there to *do something* to the reader.”⁵⁵⁹

Whilst Anger’s practice is somewhat different, in that it follows an esoteric metaphysical tract of actualisation, the functionality of his craft as an active agent of transformation can be considered in this lineage.

The following is a transcript of Allen Ginsberg’s views taken from footage shot by Iain and William Sinclair at the Dialectics of Liberation conference. In this, admittedly rather lengthy transcript, the views of the subjectivist, dissociative stance of the counterculture - with which Anger was undoubtedly associated - are

⁵⁵⁶ Joe Austin, “Rome is Burning (Psychedelic): Traces of the Social and Historical Contexts of Psychedelia,” in *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, p. 190.

⁵⁵⁷ Braunstein and Doyle, “Deconditioning,” in *Imagine Nation*, p. 15.

⁵⁵⁸ Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, p. 171.

⁵⁵⁹ Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 147.

eloquently articulated by Ginsberg, in a speech which was unscripted and unrehearsed, yet still succinctly conveys this particular mode of Sixties consciousness raising. Here, he argues specifically for the deconditioning model, and I believe his words are very demonstrative of both the Beat Generation and Anger's stance:

Propositions are difficult, I don't have a completed proposition, although I've heard some. The best experience I have had has been with the younger people of America and some few of my own generation, who have had to confront the mass hallucination, or mode of consciousness into which we were born, and have had some kind of mental break-through, which clarified not only the nature of our own identity, which is swept under by the mechanical society, but also the nature of other's identities as being the same – that we are all one – and also the nature of the entire universe perhaps, as what is very perplexingly a total Illusion, or maya.⁵⁶⁰

Then, in a typically Sixties political personalist manner, he adds the following qualifying statement: "That is not necessarily to preclude our taking direct detached action within the situation – the most detached action that I have seen taken within the situation is the use of LSD by the younger people for the purpose of demystifying their own consciousness, and aiming at some sort of common universe...thus being able to relate as self to common self."⁵⁶¹

As we can see, Anger, Ginsberg, Laing, Crowley, Leary, and an assortment of other counterculturalists are linked in their desire to break down the systemisation of conditioned subjectivity. Whilst this aspiration is distinctly utopian (the plausibility of such an endeavour may be questioned by referring to the all-

⁵⁶⁰Ginsberg, in *Ah! Sunflower*, directed Robert Klinkert and Ian Sinclair (1967; Picture Press, 2007) DVD.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

encompassing nature of ideology, or from a Lacanian perspective, the reliance upon language), it was a very powerful force in the Sixties counterculture. Unlike, for example, the Lacanian paradigm, which argues that there can ultimately be no escape from the systems of language that formulate discourse, the psychedelic movement posited a form of mystical release from such fetters. Laing's work is implicitly concerned with this discourse, as Diedrichsen describes:

The encounter of psychedelic mysticism and psychedelic politics became more ambitious in its theory as part of the British and Italian anti-psychiatric movements. Authors like Ronald D. Laing and David G. Cooper brought a diversely elaborated concept into play that, for William S. Burroughs, was a factor in the confrontation of the spiritual, turned-on rebels of beatnik culture with the power mechanisms of the establishment. I will refer to it here by its most common name: conditioning.⁵⁶²

Melechi describes how, "for Laing, like many of the influential thinkers of the radical left, mystification ruled the day. Liberation was possible, but only through a radical unthinking of the known."⁵⁶³ Curtis writes of the Sixties climate in which "the need to 'break set' and erase the imprints of 'conditioning' licensed cultural producers to explore scale, materials and technological possibilities while imaginatively raiding myth, biology and history for new archetypes."⁵⁶⁴ The following quote by Diedrichsen is lengthy, but I feel that its inclusion is vital for the explanation of my position in relation to this question:

The psychedelic discourse recognises two fundamental axioms that, strictly speaking, contradict each other. One axiom presumes that our world is false on principle. The degree and quality of its falseness are

⁵⁶² Diedrichsen, "Veiling and Unveiling," p. 86.

⁵⁶³ Melechi, "Drugs of Liberation," p. 47.

⁵⁶⁴ Curtis, "Building The Trip," p. 163.

negotiable and dependent upon the specific worldview of the parties involved. First, that the world is merely not truly knowable by us. The veil is not an absolute; moreover, it does not cover the side of objects and objectivity but consists instead of an inertia and insensitivity on the part of the subject. This can, in turn, be interpreted in various ways, in terms of politics, cultural theory or religion. This unenlightened state can also be understood in a political or philosophical sense, as merely a technical impediment that results from the limitations of our senses, which can be corrected by stimulating or improving them, or as a result of conditioning, that is, an ideological or manipulated state of subjectivity established in the interests of those in power, whose abolition is thus a political and cultural task.⁵⁶⁵

Burston describes how for Laing, “the true function of social fantasy systems is to estrange us from reality, to envelop us in a dense, obstructive sense of pseudo-reality that preempts contact with reality through multiple layers of deep epistemological error.”⁵⁶⁶ This Sixties concept of deconditioning has many parallels with Gnosticism, which in itself was an important theme in the spiritually inflected counterculture of the Sixties (as previously stated, mysticism and politics were lumped together in Sixties discourse into an overwhelming strand of illumination). Even with Marcuse, certain Gnostic characteristics may be seen in instances of his writing: “We are asleep, we are dreaming, we are dead if we experience this as reality, as life, freedom, fulfillment.”⁵⁶⁷ As Diedrichsen outlines, this “model of deconditioning, which was very much open to political interpretation, had close resemblances to the rituals of mystic or Gnostic epistemologies.”⁵⁶⁸ Such an interpretation has specific relevance to the work of Laing. In the words of Collier:

⁵⁶⁵ Diedrichsen, “Veiling and Unveiling,” p. 85.

⁵⁶⁶ Daniel Burston, *The Wing of Madness*, p. 221.

⁵⁶⁷ Marcuse, “Love Mystified: A Critique of Norman O. Brown,” p. 178.

⁵⁶⁸ Diedrichsen, “Veiling and Unveiling,” p. 87.

In the *Politics of Experience* the mysticism is of a special kind – a sort of gnostic idea of an inner self imprisoned in the socially conditioned self, and requiring deliverance...Much of the tone of *The Politics of Experience* is that of a Blakean protest against the impoverishment of experience and the imprisonment of the creative energies. Our imagination is systematically repressed from infancy on; the world we come to see is a product of the impoverished way we see it.⁵⁶⁹

Both Crowley and Laing drew heavily upon Gnostic doctrines in the formation of their theories. The spiritual, contemplative traditions akin to Gnosticism, argue that “we have overestimated our usual state of mind, yet greatly underestimated our potential. These traditions, which together form the perennial philosophy, perennial wisdom, or perennial psychology, consider our usual awareness to be only semiconscious dreams, *maya*, or a consensus trance.”⁵⁷⁰ Magick is in itself a spiritual discipline concerned with deconditioning, with Evans neatly summarising the magickal paradigm thus: “A method of continual challenge (which) can include personal, social, magical, sexual and political acts all aimed towards deconditioning the individual.”⁵⁷¹ The central premise of the writings of Georges Gurdjieff (a fellow mystic and contemporary of Crowley, whose teachings shared many similarities with the latter’s writings) can be summarised in the following statement by a student of Gurdjieff, P.D Ouspenski: “A modern man lives in sleep, in sleep he is born and in sleep he dies.”⁵⁷² Partridge writes: “Because it is often claimed that we have worldviews which are permeated by rationalism and intellectualism, many...have been led to a radical questioning of the presuppositions and understandings of truth in which they have been

⁵⁶⁹ Collier, *R.D. Laing*, pp. 184-185.

⁵⁷⁰ Roger Walsh, foreword to *Holy Madness*, p. x.

⁵⁷¹ Dave Evans, *The History of British Magick After Crowley* (London: Hidden Publishing, 2007) p. 206.

⁵⁷² P.D. Ouspenski, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of An Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World), p. 66.

educated...Only by purging the mind can one embark upon the path to truth.⁵⁷³ Within Western mythology, the archetype of truth-telling, change, surprise, and rebirth, is the trickster. Anger's film company, 'Puck Productions' has the tagline "What fools these mortals be"⁵⁷⁴ – a line from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, attributed to the Puck, the trickster and maker of mischief.



Scorpio Rising (1964)

The function of tricksters, however, is more than just to play tricks on ignorant mortals – rather, the games they play are ultimately concerned with shaking people out of their somnolence, in order that they find a more authentic mode of being. As Feugstein writes:

Many native traditions held clowns and tricksters as essential to any contact with the sacred...Humans had to have tricksters within the most

⁵⁷³ Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, p. 76.

⁵⁷⁴ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/midsummer/full.html>.

sacred ceremonies for fear that they forget the sacred comes through upset, reversal, surprise. The trickster in most native traditions is essential to creation, to birth “on a positive and constructive plane, the trickster is an agent of change and renewal, who obliges us to relinquish our fictive self-image.”⁵⁷⁵

It is perhaps important to note that Laing was also likened to a trickster, in that the Socratic impulses he displayed were measures to wake people up.⁵⁷⁶ Burston writes of Laing: “The anthropologist Joan Wescott, among others, likened him to the Trickster...an archetypal figure in world mythology who deliberately transgresses social conventions,”⁵⁷⁷ The late John Balance, partner of Peter Christopherson⁵⁷⁸ and architect of ‘Coil’ (a multimedia group who were contributors to the soundtrack for Derek Jarman’s seminal work *Blue* [1993], and were stated admirers of Anger’s work, directly citing him as an influence),⁵⁷⁹ outlines the aims of his practice in a short statement that eloquently summarises this form of aesthetic, as utilised by Anger: “I want to shake people out of their existence...and whatever it takes, we will do that.”⁵⁸⁰ Brakhage, in his ‘total liberation theory’ of the avant-garde, also shared such concerns, as Peterson describes: “According to Brakhage, everything we have been taught about art and the world itself separates us from a profound, true vision of the world. We are

⁵⁷⁵ Feuerstein, *Holy Madness*, p. 12.

⁵⁷⁶ Please see Bob Mullan ed., *R.D. Laing: Creative Destroyer* (London: Cassell, 1997).

⁵⁷⁷ Daniel Burston, *Wing of Madness: The Life and Work of R.D. Laing* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 3.

⁵⁷⁸ Sadly, also recently deceased.

⁵⁷⁹ Anger’s influence upon modern counterculture is demonstrated by the debt of acknowledgement to the filmmaker that is listed on the album sleeve for music group Coil’s *Horse Rotorvator* (Relativity, 1987). According to the band’s record label Anger contacted the band in 1998 with a view to recording a score for his – currently unfinished – work *Gnostic Mass* (unreleased); a film of the central religious ceremony of Crowley’s organisation, the Ordo Templi Orientis (<http://www.brainwashed.com/coil/news/news1998.html>).

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with Coil, *Hello Culture* (Oxford Film and Television Company, BBC, 2001): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7xE0gRazg4>.

straightjacketed by myriad conventions that prevent us from really seeing the world.”⁵⁸¹

(3.4) The Politics of Consciousness and Sixties Essentialisms

In exploring the Sixties countercultural aspiration to effect a form of deconditioning of subjectivity, it is necessary for me to delve further into the Sixties countercultural project of the politics of consciousness. Through this further exploration, I hope to reveal the tensions that were present within the counterculture, and, importantly, highlight the manner in which the modernism/postmodernism thematic influenced such divisions. I now offer some more detailed explications of the Sixties countercultural interpretations of subjectivity.

In relation to Anger, Crowley’s search for the ‘true self’ – whilst grounded in esoteric spiritual systems - has certain correlations with the widespread search for authenticity that I believe drove the Sixties counterculture of the US. In the ideal of bringing forth an authentic, free, and ultimately unfettered self, the influence of Laing upon the US counterculture was immense. Laing’s theories projected the individual psyche as being in a state of abject alienation; yet crucially, this was a condition that could be rectified through ontogenesis. For Laing, despite the inauthenticity of the ‘sleeping subject’ (which constituted the ‘normal self’) there was a draw towards – and, importantly, a possible - psychic emancipation. In that

⁵⁸¹ Peterson, *Visions of Chaos*, p. 39.

the prevailing human condition was one of alienation and fragmentation, for Laing, the 'end-game' - the teleological end point of the human condition - was the primary identification with the self in the dissolution of the false, alienated ego. From the beginning of his writings, Laing emphasised the importance of the 'inner nature', in stark contrast to the stifling conditions that arose from 'inauthentic' relations with others. In *The Politics of Experience* and his latter work, he followed this logic to its furthest point through his diagnosis of the general populace as lacking such grounding. For Laing, 'normality' entailed a closing off from the ecstatic, transcendental, inner self. In the words of Sedgwick: "Characteristic of the modern age is an over-emphasis on egoic adaptation to exterior realities, a drive to control the 'outer world' at the cost of forgetting 'the inner light' of imagination and fantasy."⁵⁸² Writing on Laing's *The Politics of Experience*, Collier describes how "there is a union here of a psychological critique of 'normal personality', not only with a political critique of the conditioning agencies which produced it, but also with a religious critique of the normal experience which fails to perceive spiritual beings and the like - a union unprecedented except in Blake."⁵⁸³

I believe the question regarding an authentic, true nature, hidden beneath the vicissitudes of modern experience is one of the central aspects of the divide within Sixties the politics of consciousness. I feel the relationship between Laing and the post-Lacanian school of radical psychoanalysis - as represented by his counterpart, acquaintance, and critic, Felix Guattari - presents an appropriate representation of the particular tension between modernist and postmodernist approaches towards

⁵⁸² Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 100.

⁵⁸³ Collier, *R.D. Laing*, p. 188.

the liberation of the subject within the Sixties. Ingleby aptly summarises this problem when he states: "It is the great question between those who believe in an essence and those who don't."⁵⁸⁴ A comparative analysis of the two theorists' takes on subjectivity not only illuminates the nature of the divide between the modernist aspects of the Sixties and the emergence of the postmodern, but I hope casts some further light on the differences between radical Anglo-Saxon and Continental approaches towards psychoanalysis.

In analysing Anger's intent, we must look at the more modernist perspective of psychoanalysis to which Laing is distinctly affiliated. For Laing, consciousness and human agency remain the ontological grounding on which the essentialism of authentic existence is founded. Laing was profoundly influenced in this by the work of Sartre,⁵⁸⁵ who differentiated between consciousness and the ego, and argued that the ego is largely an illusory entity. While Sartre would totally disregard Laing's mystical leanings, his thought permeates Laing's work, as does that of the existentialist tradition itself; most notably the writings of Kierkegaard. Sartre's *The Transcendence of the Ego*⁵⁸⁶ - an early work which informed much of his seminal 1943 work *Being and Nothingness*⁵⁸⁷ - conveys an exquisite account of the construction of the ego as a product of consciousness in explicit relation to being in the world; consciousness, or the 'self' remaining the intrinsic ultimate. In the work Sartre explicitly states: "The Ego is neither formally nor materially *in*

⁵⁸⁴ David Ingleby, introduction to *The Sane Society*, by Eric Fromm (London: Routledge, 2002), p. xxii.

⁵⁸⁵ It is perhaps worth noting that Laing was in direct contact with Sartre, visiting him numerous times in Paris.

⁵⁸⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: A Sketch for a Phenomenological Description*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁸⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Estella Barnes (London: Routledge, 2002).

consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*; it is a being in the world, like the Ego of another.”⁵⁸⁸

Laing’s dependence upon Sartre is evident throughout his work, and brings forth the important question of Laing’s relationship⁵⁸⁹ to the Sixties Post-Lacanian radical school of psychoanalysis centred in the Continent, which was also partly founded upon a radical reading of Sartre. Laing’s relationship to the Continental school of psychoanalysis is complex and, importantly, highlights the differences of opinion between the Anglo-Saxon and Continental approaches. It is through such analysis of the differences that we may ascertain more about the US model of the self, which is integral to the countercultural aspirations for authentic existence. I also feel that, as previously stated, it reveals a great deal about the ambiguities

⁵⁸⁸ Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁹ Mitchell and Black state of Lacan: “His work is a dominant presence in psychoanalysis both in Europe and in South America. Although his influence on English-speaking psychoanalysts has been minimal, his impact upon academia, particularly literary criticism, has been considerable.” (Stephen A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* [Basic Books, 1995], p. 193). Peter Dews has written briefly on the relations between Laing and Lacan:

Like Lacan, Laing is concerned to debunk organicist aetiologies of madness, although his specific concern is with schizophrenia, rather than paranoia, and to demonstrate the intrinsic meaningfulness of the speech and action of those labelled insane. Furthermore, in the course of this enterprise Laing develops a theory of intersubjectivity and its dilemmas which is in many ways similar to that of Lacan. Despite the fact that Laing places the emphasis on ‘experience’, whereas for Lacan intersubjectivity is primarily linguistic, both theories are ultimately derived from Hegel, Lacan’s more directly, and Laing’s via the philosophy of Sartre. (Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* [London: Verso Books, 1987], p. 84)

Lacan shared Laing’s hostility to ego psychology, as elucidated by Mitchell and Black: “Both ego psychology and object relations theories are based on fundamental (and complementary) misreadings of Freud in which the ego and object relations are given priority, Lacan believed; the determinative dimension in human experience is neither self (i.e., ego) nor relations with others, but language” (Mitchell and Black, *Freud and Beyond*, pp. 195-196). Burston has also noted of the two thinkers that here and there, the similarities are striking. Laing’s assertion that the ego must be negated also bears some relation to Lacan’s characterisation of the ego as “an ‘imaginary function’, a creature of ‘specular identification; or an illusory and artificial construct embedded in ‘the discourse of the other’. Lacan said the goal of analysis was to deconstruct the ego, rather than to support and strengthen it, as Freud and his followers had enjoined” (Burston, *The Crucible of Experience*, p. 122).

concerning the modernism/postmodernism debate that I believe ran throughout the Sixties. In this case, the differences are symbolically, and instrumentally, represented by differing geographic locations; with Lacan's influence extending to the consideration of the postmodern subject. This is opposed to what I consider to be the modernist ethos underlying the Anglo-Saxon approaches, to which I believe the American Counterculture was firmly committed. Lacanian inflected radical psychoanalysis, integral as it was to the counterculture movement in France, was founded upon "the abandonment in a belief in a human essence which could function as a yardstick for social progress. The postmodern subject had no identity, or rather, had as many identities as there were discourses in which to participate...today's individuals do not know who they are, and (if we are to believe the postmodernists) are frankly relieved not to have to any more."⁵⁹⁰ As Ingleby states: "The debate between postmodernists and modernists – between relativists and the believers in absolute standards of rationality – is perhaps the central issue of contemporary social science."⁵⁹¹

Laing's approach is markedly within the essentialist paradigm, which is integral to his critique of the human situation prevalent at that time – an approach that resonates with Anger's personal, spiritual belief system. In conversation with Bob Mullan, Laing stated: "You know there are Chinese texts or old Hindu texts and so on – this can get to one, this sense of some absolute, very profound common factor in being human."⁵⁹² Laing then continues to follow the essentialist paradigm in his discussion: "I have to reject Nietzsche's criticism of 'truth'. That whatever we call truth is simply what we need to make our beliefs compatible with our existence

⁵⁹⁰ Ingleby, introduction to *The Sane Society*, p. xix.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Laing, quoted in Mullan, *Mad to Be Normal*, p. 95.

and our existence compatible with being.”⁵⁹³ He further continues this holistic mode of thinking:

The world is coherent, the cosmos blows one’s mind with its consistency and coherence; the main domain of incoherence in this universe seems to be the human species in the way it conducts itself in this cosmos. There definitely seems to be something seriously the matter with the human species in its reckless and wanton destruction of other life forms and our collective lack of companionability. The name of the game of survival doesn’t seem to be the ruthless destruction of everything else except ourselves in order to survive, rather there is some profound law of symbiosis of co-existence and living together that we are missing which is our main species mistake, as it were, at the moment.⁵⁹⁴

The aim of deconditioning within the US counterculture was to uncover an intrinsic essence, and it appears one of the fundamental disjunctures in theory between the US and Continental countercultural movements is the very question of the underlying essence of being. In this particular example, one is grounded in a Sartrean sense of self, and the other, in post-Lacanian theory.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹³ Laing, quoted in Mullan, *Mad to Be Normal*, p. 95.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 311-312.

⁵⁹⁵ Laing was, however, less eager to offer praise of his counterpart, however tentative Guattari’s may have been. In his conversations with Bob Mullan, Laing recounts:

On the occasion that I was over in Paris once in the early ‘70s, I was invited round to an evening at Felix Guattari’s house...I never got on with Guattari. He had written *Anti-Oedipus* with Deleuze and I thought it was just intellectual wanking. But he asked me to give him my autograph and I was just about to do so and turned over the back of the place where I was supposed to be putting my signature and found out it was a petition to the president of France to release a terrorist hijacker. I was very angry and didn’t actually storm out of his house but I told him, in my Glaswegian, that it was an absolute piece of impertinence to ask me to sign something like that that I had never seen. And *had* I seen it, I wouldn’t begin to sign it. I thought they were all completely phoney – all the things Szasz might have to say about the phoney radical salon revolutionary left, well, this was them, the Guattari crowd...In Paris he was the director of the so called therapeutic community, and on the one hand he was playing this as a development of a Cooperesque anti-psychiatry sort of thing. But in *practice* it was fuck all, it was just like any other psychiatric clinic. He was using electric shocks. He just said, they pay me the money, I never go there, they can’t sack me and I can’t do anything so I just leave them to themselves. (Laing, quoted in Mullan, *Mad to Be Normal*, p. 365) In Guattari’s defence, François Dosse acknowledges that while La

For postmodern conceptions of subjectivity, the subject is not “putatively or potentially unified, but rather is fluid, permeable, fragmented, shifting, nomadic, non-essential, non-self-identical, hybrid, and no longer clearly separable from any ‘other’.

Unity and homogeneity, in general, give way to diversity and heterogeneity, directionality to flux, hybridity, and boundary-crossing.”⁵⁹⁶ For Lacanian inflected psychoanalysis, the experiences of consciousness, agency, and selfhood are the illusory products of social structures or systems, and are not inherent subjective qualities. This is where Laing’s particular reading of Sartre differs most markedly from the post-Lacanian Continental model, and is illustrative of the ‘essentialist’ divide. In his particular approach, Laing also drew upon the work of Martin Buber, who argued that selfhood was an intrinsic ontological fact, rather than an illusion perpetuated by the flux of external social relations. Burston elucidates: “Laing, like Sartre, saw the ego as a largely illusory entity, but did not dismiss the existence of the self...Sartrean existentialism would be utterly vacuous without the concepts of consciousness and human agency, and so would Laingian thought.”⁵⁹⁷

Brick describes how “the French theorists of post structuralism...were part of a radical generation that emerged during the late 1960s and turned against a ‘modern’ French standard (Jean Paul Sartre’s existential philosophy) with an ‘anti-

Borde remained a psychiatric institution in the conventional framework, “in fact, the positions taken by Guattari in this debate manifested a proximity to every current aiming at subverting psychiatry. He was much more receptive than Oury [the Director of La Borde] to the theses of anti-psychiatry, in particular to the political questioning of the system” (Françoise Dosse, introduction to Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy: Text and Interviews 1972-1977*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. David L. Sweet, Jarred Becker, and Taylor Adkins [Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009], pp. 19-20).

⁵⁹⁶ DeKoven, *Utopia Limited*, p. 17.

⁵⁹⁷ Burston, *The Crucible of Experience*, p. 123.

humanist' program."⁵⁹⁸ For Guattari, the 'self' is the residue from the intersection of multiple drives that constitute the wider flux in a seeming singularity, but are, in fact, what can be considered to be 'extra-personal'. Thus, the seemingly constituted self is no more than the intersection of multiple strands of drives, or, akin to Foucault, of discourses that trace the body, homogenised into an apparently singularity, or unison of 'voice'. There is no intrinsic essence to be defined, or more appropriately, 'discovered', but the concern is with the liberation of such drives in the infinitude of the flux which composes the inter-relations of organic beings in lived experience. In direct reference to Laing, Deleuze and Guattari state within *Anti Oedipus*: "It is certain that neither men nor women are clearly defined personalities, but rather vibrations, flows, schizzes, and knots."⁵⁹⁹ For them, the 'self' is not an actuality; rather the term "refers to personological coordinates from which it results."⁶⁰⁰ Importantly, there is no distinction between that of the 'inter', and 'intra', and the dualistic separation of self and other, but rather, all are subsumed in the endless pluralistic productivity of immanent desire; a stance which is in marked difference to Laing's emphasis upon the relations of the singular 'self' to the other; in authentic 'relations', 'communion', and actualisation of potentiality. Collier elucidates Laing's position:

The psyche is not a *unitary* whole of which the parts merely express a single principle – the 'autonomous' consciousness. It is a *unified* whole, which has achieved a more or less stable equilibrium under the direction of consciousness, but which has other (unconscious) elements which may obstruct this direction, which may act on and determine consciousness independently of its knowledge or volition, which may in turn be acted upon by consciousness, etc.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁸ Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. 61.

⁵⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 396.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Collier, *R.D Laing*, p. 27,

For Deleuze and Guattari, however, the self is nothing more than a temporary and perpetually shifting conglomeration, which constitutes subjectivity. In the words of Turkle:

Deleuze and Guattari take Lacan's ideas about the decentered subject and carry them several steps farther than he does. Although Lacan believes that the self is constituted by imaginary misrecognitions and rupture, he still works to diagram and even mathematically express the relationship among its elements. But Deleuze and Guattari describe a self of such flux and fragmentation that a methodology of trying to grasp discrete relationships between determinate objects is clearly missing the point. For them, the self is a collection of machine-parts, what they refer to as "desiring machines."⁶⁰²

Turkle describes how, within such a model

each person's machine parts can plug and unplug with the machine parts of another: there is no self, only the cacophony of desiring-machines. In human relationships, one whole person never relates to another whole person because there is no such thing as the "whole person." There are only connections between the desiring-machines. Fragmentation is a universal of the human conditions, not something specific to the schizophrenic.⁶⁰³

In Guattari's words: "What I wish to stress is the fundamentally pluralist, multi-centered, heterogeneous character of contemporary subjectivity, in spite of the homogenization which objectifies through mass-meditization. In this respect, an individual is already a 'collective' of heterogeneous components."⁶⁰⁴ An approach which "would no longer revolve around the opposition between conscious and

⁶⁰² Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 148.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., p. 149.

⁶⁰⁴ Guattari, "Les nouveaux mondes du capitalisme," *Libération* (December 22, 1987), quoted in *Chaosophy*, p. 29.

unconscious, but would envisage the unconscious as an overlay of diverse heterogeneous strata of subjectification, each of variable consistency and productive of flows.”⁶⁰⁵ For Guattari, what is needed is a liberation of the complexity of multiplicity that constitutes the subject,⁶⁰⁶ not a re-integration or ‘actualisation’, as in Laing’s approach. Guattari describes how “schizoanalysis, rather than moving in the direction of reductionist modelisations which simplify the complex, will work towards its complexification, its processual enrichment, towards the consistency of its virtual lines of bifurcation and differentiation, in short towards its ontological heterogeneity.”⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁵ Guattari, *Cartographies schizoanalytiques*, trans. Françoise Dosse (Paris: Galilée, 1989), quoted in *Chaosophy*, p. 27.

⁶⁰⁶ It is important to acknowledge that the postmodern, fragmentary model of subjectivity - as well as having many supporters - has come under attack in recent critical theory. Jane Flax, a psychotherapist and Professor of political science, argues:

Postmodernists intend to persuade us that we should be suspicious of a notion of self or subjectivity. Any such notion may be bound up with and support dangerous and oppressive “humanist” myths. However, I am deeply suspicious of the motives of those who would counsel such a position at the same time as women have just begun to re-member their selves and to claim an agentic subjectivity available always before only to a few privileged white men. It is possible that unconsciously, rather than share such a (revised) subjectivity with the “others,” the privileged would reassure us that it was ‘really’ oppressive to them all along. (Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990], p. 220)

Flax then goes on to argue that in the arena of mental health, the notion of the fragmented individual could have specific consequences for such individuals:

I work with people suffering from “borderline syndrome.” In this illness the self is in painful and disabling fragments. Borderline patients lack a core self without which the registering of and pleasure in a variety of experiencing of ourselves, others, and the outer world are simply not possible. Those who celebrate or call for a “decentred” self seem self-deceptively naïve and unaware of the basic cohesion within themselves that makes the fragmentation of experiences something other than a terrifying slide into psychosis. (Flax, *Thinking Fragments*, pp. 218-219)

Gen Doy also describes how in the history of identity politics: “women, black people, lesbians and gay men, to name but a few of the many subjected to oppression and exploitation during the period of ‘modernity’, were not in a hurry to discard notions of self-consciousness, self-determination, the concept of individual agency, and the ability to act on society from a perspective of critical reform or even revolution.”⁶⁰⁶ Gen Doy, *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture* (London: Taurus, 2005), p. 3.

⁶⁰⁷ Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julius Pefanis. (Sydney: Power Publications, 2006), p. 61.

For Deleuze and Guattari, this is dependent upon 'becoming'; a process which is irrevocably tied to the 'Body Without Organs'. This conceptual hypothesis, derived from Artaud, refers to the virtual dimension of the body - a subtle body that is not defined by the 'lived' attributes of the 'actual body', i.e. those traits, affects, habits etc. which are present in exigent cognisance. Rather, the virtual body is a resource of vast potentiality that exists on the virtual plane, unbound by the metaphor of anatomical organisation. In the words of Deleuze: "The body without organs does not lack organs, it simply lacks the organism, that is this particular organization of organs. The body without organs is thus defined as *an indeterminate organ*, whereas the organism is defined by determinate organs."⁶⁰⁸ In making oneself a body without organs, one extracts qualities, affects, etc. from this vast ocean of potentiality; to actualise the myriad attributes that ostensibly lie dormant. Such a process, when it occurs in relation to other bodies without organs, is 'becoming' - a process intrinsically tied to and sustained by the plane of immanence. Deleuze and Guattari have this to say on the affirmative process of making oneself a BwO:

Why such a dreary parade of sucked-dry, catatonicized, vitrified, sewn-up bodies, when the BwO is also full of gaiety, ecstasy, and dance? Why not walk on your head, wig with your sinuses, see through your skin, breathe with your belly: the simple Thing, the Entity, the full Body, the stationary Voyage, Anorexia, cutaneous Vision, Yoga, Krishna, Love, Experimentation. Where psychoanalysis says, "Stop, find your self again," we should say instead, "Let's go further still, we haven't found our BwO yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self." Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation. Find your body without organs.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith. (London: Continuum), p. 34.

⁶⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 167.

For Guattari, Laing's approach is no more than a non-recognition of the autonomous processes which constitute the subject and, as such, Deleuze and Guattari have little time for his teleotic characterisations, describing how "he falls back into the worst familialist, personological, and egoic postulates, so that the remedies invoked are no more than a 'sincere corroboration among parents', a 'recognition of the real persons', a discovery of the true ego or self as in Martin Buber."⁶¹⁰ Buber was himself a profound influence upon Laing, as indeed he was for the strain of existentialist thought that is resolutely religious in nature. Laing's approach leads him to speak of psychic liberation in terms of self-liberation, while Deleuze and Guattari would rather address the anonymous processes that construct the illusion of singularity: "To uncover these connections by rejecting the false coherency of the 'whole self'. The point of all this is not to go crazy, but to schizophrize, that is, to become aware of fragmentation, disorder, and the fact that there is no boundary between the politics of desire being played out in the self and that which is continually being played out in society."⁶¹¹ As detailed in the work Guattari authored with Deleuze, *What is Philosophy*,⁶¹² therapeutic practice is the same procedural engagement as art, philosophy, political activism etc. – the release of the heterogeneous elements that comprise subjectivity in a liberation of desire, un-channelled into capitalist systemization; all considered potential revolutionary activism on all 'levels', be they psychical or cosmic; hierarchical interpretations which are subsumed within the infinitude of the flux that constitutes life; a pure possibility of freedom.

⁶¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 394.

⁶¹¹ Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 153.

⁶¹² Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (London: Verso Books, 1994).

As for Laing, Kotowicz argues that in his search for the authentic self

Laing fell into an inconsistency...The true, the authentic, resides in the 'inner' self, or in the transcendental; all that makes up the muck takes place between people. To put it differently, Laing sought to establish a 'science of persons' in analysing the way they relate, but the absolute Truth, according to him, resides in the inner self, albeit a self that expands into a transcendental realm. It will not take long before one will discover that this scheme of things leads into a cul-de-sac.⁶¹³

Thus, the interactional, authentic self, as revealed by its presence in relation to 'others', becomes devaluated in the concept of the necessity of its very transcendence. Despite these theoretical inconsistencies however, Laing's influence upon the wider counterculture of the US cannot be denied, and thus I do not believe that such criticisms are pertinent to our present concerns. For Laing, consciousness – the self - and human agency remain the ontological grounding on which the essentialism of authentic existence is founded.

I believe the differences between Laing and Guattari's conceptions of subjectivity reveal certain tensions between modernist conceptions of the self and those of the postmodern, pluralistic subject.⁶¹⁴ As countercultural models, they both

⁶¹³ Kotowicz, R.D. *Laing and the Paths of Anti-Psychiatry*, p. 68.

⁶¹⁴ Laing's influence upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari is most apparent – they refer to him throughout *Anti-Oedipus*, along with David Cooper - although they present him as a distinct pioneer who nevertheless remains trapped in the personalist, Sartrean model of the self. Speaking of the first meeting between Guattari, Laing, and Cooper, Dosee writes:

Guattari met them during a conference called 'Journées de l'enfance aliénée' organized in 1967 by Maud Mannoni and featuring Jacques Lacan....But he was not convinced by their anti-psychiatric practice...He considered them to be trapped in the Oedipal schema which he tried to surpass with Deleuze by publishing *Anti-Oedipus*. Soon after, he did his best to deconstruct the Anglo-Saxon experiment of anti-psychiatry. (Dosee, introduction to *Chaosophy*, p. 20)

Guattari's critique of Laing reveals a great deal about the differing approaches to change that the counterculture prescribed, and as such, I believe the following quote from Guattari sheds light on

emphasise the need for the liberation of desire and latent potentiality; yet Laing's work remains grounded in an essentialist paradigm, which speaks volumes for the nature of the conditional subject in countercultural America. Importantly, much of the US emphasis upon the self as the ontological ultimate seems to be founded upon the distinct US heritage of religious thought. Ellwood has suggested how, in "the American cultural milieu, deeply molded by countless religious quests...America religion has generally been the most available language for that which is of unconditioned importance."⁶¹⁵ Anger, implicitly situated within a religious spectrum - although certainly unconventional - is necessarily of the same continuum of religious thought - that of prophesying an idealised subject.

the differences in approaches between the more spiritually inclined facets of the counterculture, and the resolutely materialist:

Laing thought he could outwit neurotic alienation by centering the analysis on the family, on its internal 'knots'. For him, everything starts with the family. He would like, however, to break away from it. He would like to merge with the cosmos, to burst the everydayness of existence. But his mode of explanation cannot release the subject from the grip of familialism that he wanted only as a point of departure and which reappears at every turn. He tries to resolve the problem by taking refuge in an Oriental style of meditation that could not definitely guard against the intrusion of a capitalist subjectivity with the most subtle means at its disposal. One doesn't bargain with Oedipus: as long as this essential structure of capitalist repression is not attacked head-on, one will not be able to make any decisive changes in the economy of desire and thus, in the status of madness. (Guattari, "Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness," *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko [Oxford: Blackwell, 1996]: p. 48, quoted in Genosko, *Felix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* [London: Continuum, 2002], p. 32)

Despite the criticisms that stemmed from the continent, Sedgwick describes how, "arriving in the wake of the 'May events', the French translations of Laing's and Cooper's work came at exactly the right moment to detonate an explosion of interest in 'L'antipsychiatre among an enlarged and confident left public" (Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 49). Guattari described the Anglo-Saxon project of anti-psychiatry as "a mixture of neo-behaviourist dogmatism, familiarism, and the most traditional Puritanism" (Guattari, *Chaosophy*, p. 20). As Dosse describes, he criticised the Anglo-Saxon model by arguing that, "instead of framing this familiarist drift within the patient-psychiatrist dual relation, it pushed it to the extreme, allowing the eventual deployment of a collective and theatrical formation exacerbating all its effects....the cure was wrongly directed because what... [was] needed was not more family, but more society" (Dosse, *Chaosophy*, p. 21). It is important to note however that this geographic dualism between what was seemingly a resolutely modernist conception of the self in Anglo-Saxon quarters, and a vanguard continental theory, was distinctly challenged in the mid 1970's. Gradually, "American incorporation of French post structuralism...provided academic cultural criticism with a new vocabulary that was opposed to 'centred' notions of self and reality, and open to the diverse, fragmented, and uncertain qualities of experience." (Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, p. 61)

⁶¹⁵ Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, p. 10.

(3.5) Psychedelic Politics

As I have argued, within the Sixties politics of consciousness there were differing approaches towards the question of where to begin with regard to changing American life. Put crudely, to firstly change structure, or psyche? Those movements concerned with the primacy of consciousness alteration as a qualifier for political change in itself, have, as previously stated, been described as the 'expressive' or 'religious' strain of the Sixties US counterculture. The growth of 'religious' (as defined by Berki),⁶¹⁶ progressive movements that centred around the 'inner revolution', was facilitated, in no small part, by the widespread use of psychedelic substances. The most overt statement of the mode of subjective, 'inner' consciousness alteration was epitomised in the psychedelic movement of the period. Psychedelia had a profound impact upon the personalist politics of the era, as the expansion of awareness through the use of such substances was considered by some elements of the counterculture to be a political act in itself. Such a mode of revolution, as Roszack describes, "comes down to the simple syllogism: change the prevailing mode of consciousness and you change the world: the use of dope *ex opere operato* changes the prevailing mode of consciousness; therefore, universalize the use of dope and you change the world."⁶¹⁷ Diedrichsen elucidates this hypothesis: "The unspoken assumption was that the insight the subjects gained through their psychedelic experiences would affect them, as human beings as a whole — spiritually and metaphysically, on the one hand, and morally and politically, on the other."⁶¹⁸ As a result of this particular belief, "there was a

⁶¹⁶ Berki, "Marcuse and the Crisis of the New Radicalism," p. 57.

⁶¹⁷ Roszack, *The Making of A Counterculture*, p. 168.

⁶¹⁸ Diedrichsen, "Veiling and Unveiling," p. 86.

widespread idea that all that was necessary was to turn on the politicians, the adults, the powers that be and the other representatives of the establishment, and they would see what they had been doing...To bring salvation through perception.”⁶¹⁹

As one might expect, numerous Sixties organisations concerned with the propagation of this psychedelic approach to politics sprang up throughout the US. Anger, Leary, and the Process Church⁶²⁰ formed the ‘Himalayan Academy’, which was a loosely bound organisation concerned with widening the awareness of LSD. The Himalayan Academy eventually evolved into the Castalia foundation, which essentially carried on the same work under a different name. Using Gnostic terminology, this organisation’s mode of engagement in the politics of consciousness took the form of calling for the need to ‘awaken’ from ‘normal’ existence; a procedure to be facilitated by LSD. One of their pamphlets, distributed in 1964 (and reprinted here in *the Sigma Portfolio*), stated:

Those that stumble upon the riddle of consciousness and its solution...learn again the age old lesson taught by mystics and philosophers of East and West: that most of mankind is sleepwalking, moving somnambulistically through a world of rote perceptions. As have many internal explorers of the past, they become dedicated to the ideal of maximum awareness and internal freedom.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ The Process Church is a religious group that was most active in the Sixties and Seventies, although they continue today on a very small scale. Their doctrine is a loose combination, rather bizarrely, of Christianity and Satanism.

⁶²¹ One-sheet leaflet for the Castalia Foundation, in *Sigma Portfolio* 28 (1964), Wilson, “Spontaneous Underground,” p. 64.

Leary, as the figurehead of the organisation, was representative of this form of psychedelic politics when he argued, “the paths of spiritual discovery and political opposition were closely intertwined. At the same time, he rejected politics as such as inconsequential and believed that radical change of the 'system' was only possible through fundamental changes of consciousness.”⁶²² Pinchbeck forwards the proposition that the psychedelic discourse “is not indifferent to the raging world of globalization, transcultural collisions, economic decline, environmental disaster, and military confrontations on all levels. Rather it signifies the desire to go inward, to find a secluded niche within the psyche.”⁶²³ This form of psychedelic politics ties in with the mystical approach towards implementing change, and with it comes the criticisms that apply to such arguments. Despite the problems that one may have with such an approach, it was a specific and prominent trend within Sixties countercultural society. In this model, “such an expansion of consciousness – although primarily a personal voyage – enacted a direct confrontation and attack on the values of the establishment and ‘straight’ society in general.”⁶²⁴ Despite what I would argue to be their tenuous nature, I believe it is demonstrated that these acts were at least considered political. As to the question of the use of drugs in relation to the politics of consciousness, Fuller explicitly addresses this in his writing:

The fact that the use of drugs is connected with both the profane and the sacred spheres of human life alerts us to what might be called the ‘politics of consciousness.’...Drug use can be sanctioned as long as it ultimately serves the greater causes of economic efficiency and orderly control (e.g. coffee consumption at the work place, moderate alcohol consumption to unwind and regenerate oneself for the next business

⁶²² Grunenberger, “The Politics of Ecstasy,” p. 15.

⁶²³ Morgan, “Eternal Moments,” p. 47.

⁶²⁴ Wilson, “Spontaneous Underground,” p. 65.

day), but not when it interferes with the prime values of our secular culture.⁶²⁵

Laing's consideration of the political question of psychedelic drug use was that "one ought not to think that the regimentation of one's own biochemistry comes solely within the province of the state."⁶²⁶ As the psychedelic movement progressed, "political engagement would evolve into a more personally defined and defining cultural politics that would exchange the spectre of the bomb for a hallucinogenic reordering of time and space, and ultimately, so it was hoped, of the fabric and structure of society itself."⁶²⁷ For the psychedelic strain of the politics of consciousness of the Sixties, the insights gained through psychedelic drugs were seen as a direct attack upon the standardised forms of subjectivity propagated by the status quo.

As one can imagine, such an approach carried little weight with the more active political elements of the counterculture, as while "individual members of the New Left experimented with LSD, they did so with none of the visionary implications of the Learyites or Keseyites. In fact, the New Left considered it socially irresponsible to focus on oneself when the real task was to benefit all mankind by ridding the country of the existing political and economic system."⁶²⁸ Marcuse, while initially ambivalent towards the acid-soaked counterculture in his early work, tempered his view in his latter writings, particularly in *'An Essay on Liberation'*, from which the following is taken:

⁶²⁵ Robert C. Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven*, p. 11,

⁶²⁶ Laing, quoted in *International Times* (October 14-27, 1966): p. 4, quoted in Melechi, *Psychodelia Britannica*, p. 45.

⁶²⁷ Wilson, "Spontaneous Underground," p. 66.

⁶²⁸ Michals, "Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self," p 50.

The 'trip' involves the dissolution of the ego shaped by the established society – an artificial and short-lived dissolution of ordinary and orderly perception. But the artificial and 'private' liberation anticipates, in a distorted manner, an exigency of the social revolution: the revolution must be at the same time a revolution in perception which will accompany the material and intellectual reconstruction of society.⁶²⁹

LSD could be a catalyst to prompt personal forms of political engagement – the direct politics of personalism - rather than, as the romantic strain proposed, an act of liberation in itself. Carl Oglesby, former president of SDS, described this in very explicit terms: "The experience shared the structural characteristics of political rebellion, and resonated those changes so that the two became independent prongs of an over-arching transcending rebellion that took in the person and the State at the same time"⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 43-44.

⁶³⁰ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, p. 132.

4

Madness, Mysticism, and Psychedelia

People believe that if you abandon the discourse of reason, you fall into the black night of passions, of murder, and the dissolution of all social life. But I think the discourse of reason is the pathology, the morbid discourse par excellence. Simply look at what happens in the world, because it is the discourse of reason that is in power everywhere.⁶³¹

- Felix Guattari

The mystic and the schizophrenic find themselves in the same ocean, but whereas the mystic swims, the schizophrenic drowns.⁶³²

- R.D. Laing

If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.⁶³³

- William Blake

To recall an earlier statement by Laing: “There’s a tremendous need to get out of this alienated little ego here, and if people don’t do it by flipping out into a psychotic state, a lot of people try to do so by means of drugs.”⁶³⁴ In this statement, Laing presents the prevalent Sixties hypothesis concerning psychedelics. Psychedelia in Sixties discourse was understood primarily through the interpretive frameworks of psychosis and mysticism - experiential conditions

⁶³¹ Guattari, *Chaosophy*, p. 288.

⁶³² R.D. Laing, quoted in Clay, *R.D. Laing*, p. 34.

⁶³³ William Blake, “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” plate 7, *Proverbs of Hell* (1793), quoted in Joseph Black, *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Age of Romanticism* (London: Broadview Press, 2010), p. 74.

⁶³⁴ Unpublished interview with R.D. Laing (Loveday Drug Books, 1965), quoted in Melechi, *Psychedelia Britannica*, p. 45.

that were not held as exclusive; a factor that had considerable impact upon both Anger's psychedelic work and the wider aesthetic forms of the Sixties, as we shall see in this chapter. Madness was perhaps emblematic of the Sixties countercultural position concerning the politics of consciousness; a belief that would inflect the entire landscape of the psychopolitics of the Sixties itself.

(4.1) Psychedelic Madness

After establishing himself in the emergent psychedelic culture of California, amongst Leary and the prophesiers of the new 'acid consciousness', Anger proceeded to locate to the other centre of the psychedelic scene in the West - 'swinging' London. Anger has always been a particularly nomadic individual, but the social scenes in which he integrated himself most fully were found in San Francisco and London; both Western magnets of Sixties psychedelia. This is not to deny Anger's firm relation to New York and the Filmmakers Co-operative, founded by his friend Jonas Mekas, but it was from these two locations that I argue Anger produced his most successful aesthetic constructs of psychically transformative force.

Moving to London in the late 1960s, he honed his sights on the nexus from which the vast majority of American art was finding its way into Britain - Robert Frasier's Gallery. It was here that much of the work of Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine,

Bruce Conner, Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol,⁶³⁵ and Ed Ruscha - alongside British artists Bridget Riley, Peter Blake, Richard Hamilton and Edward Paolozzi - was first exhibited. Anger became close friends with Frasier, even travelling to India with the eccentric gallery owner in 1968.⁶³⁶ Through his close association with the gallery, Anger became friends with the Rolling Stones, Yoko Ono, The Beatles, Marianne Faithfull, Anita Pallenberg, and Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin. As an unparalleled expert on Aleister Crowley and the occult, Anger offered guidance in the magickal arts to these celebrities fascinated with the increasingly fashionable esoteric philosophies of Crowley. Anger's methodical and spiritually investigative experiments with mind-altering substances also pre-dated the Sixties resurgence, and so he occupied a lofty iconic role to those within his London orbit. In an interview with *Rolling Stone Magazine*, Keith Richards even described how "Kenneth Anger has called me his right-hand man,"⁶³⁷ indicating the distinct influence he held over those prime movers and shakers in the London psychedelic scene. It was while Anger was in London that he constructed what I argue to be his most important work, *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969), and it is this film that forms the basis of my analysis within this chapter.

Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969) was assembled predominantly from discarded footage initially shot for utilisation in Anger's subsequent effort, *Lucifer*

⁶³⁵ Warhol was vocal in his admiration of Anger, with the latter's influence certainly seen in the formal aesthetic of specific instances of Warhol's films. For example, Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) is uncannily like the shot of Anger dreaming at the beginning of *Fireworks* (1947). Put somewhat gently, this admiration was not reciprocated however. Anger called Warhol "the garbage merchant of our time" (Rayns and DuCane, "Dedication to Create Make Believe," p. 48). When pressed regarding his relationship with Warhol at a screening of his works at The National Film Theatre (UK), Anger recounted how Warhol was "under the delusion that I thought he was the devil, which is bullshit. I have far more respect for Lucifer than that" (Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Michael O'Pray, BFI Audio Archive [17/01/1990], National Film Theatre, Southbank, London).

⁶³⁶ An excellent account of Anger's years in orbit around the Frasier Gallery is given in Harriet Vyner's *Groovy Bob: The Life and Times of Robert Frasier* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999).

⁶³⁷ Quoted in Landis, *Anger*, p. 166.

Rising (1972). The majority of Anger's footage for the film was stolen by Bobby Beausoleil after the two had an argument, which according to Anger was due to the fact that Beausoleil had spent money intended for the film on a large quantity of marijuana: "I went out to dinner a night or two later and he came back and took the film. It was enough for about an hour and a half feature; it was practically finished."⁶³⁸ Anger utilised what footage remained, combined with new work shot in London, to form *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969). In his own words, "I went to England and pieced together the scraps of *Lucifer Rising* that had been left in the cutting bin."⁶³⁹ Anger has described the film as "a fragment made in a fury,"⁶⁴⁰ and indeed the manner and circumstances of its construction appear to have had a discernable impact upon the formal qualities of the work itself. Tony Rayns describes the work as "a fast moving, very concentrated collage of Magick elements, in effect like the last thirty seconds of *Scorpio Rising* extended to ten minutes. Anger calls it 'my most out-front film.'"⁶⁴¹

Upon its release in August 1968, *Invocation* was enthusiastically received on the United States underground film circuit, and was awarded the Independent Film Award by the *Film Culture* anthology.⁶⁴² It was Anger's first presented work for

⁶³⁸ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Roy Frumkes, "Look Back with Kenneth Anger: Remembrances from the Life of America's Foremost Experimental Filmmaker," *Films in Review* 48, no. 1 (Jan): p. 22.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁴⁰ Anger, quoted in *The Films of Kenneth Anger: Volume Two*, Fantomas DVD booklet (San Francisco: Fantomas, 2007), p. 22.

⁶⁴¹ Rayns, "Lucifer: A Kenneth Anger Kompendium," p. 31.

⁶⁴² *Film Culture* presented Anger with the following:

For his film *Invocation of my Demon Brother* specifically, and for his entire creative work in general; for his unique fusion of magick, symbolism, myth, mystery, and vision with the most modern sensibilities, techniques, and rhythms of being; for revealing it all in a refreshed light, persistently, constantly, and with growing complexity of means and content; at the same time, for doing it with an amazing clarity, directness and sureness; for giving our eye and our senses some of the most sensuous and mysterious images cinema has created. (Sitney, *The Film Culture Reader*, p 429)

more than two years – the period after which Anger had announced his ‘death’ as a filmmaker in a large advertisement in the *Village Voice*, due to the loss of the footage for the initial cut of *Lucifer Rising* (1972). The film itself, whilst deliberately lacking any form of narrative structure, loosely centres around footage of a ritual Anger performed on September 21st, 1967 - ‘The Equinox of the Gods’, which was to celebrate the pagan holiday of the Autumn Equinox. The event itself was extremely emblematic of the occult influenced psychedelic drug culture of Haight Ashbury, San Francisco. In the words of Beausoleil: “The night that we were doing it – the night of the celebration, performance, whatever you want to call it – Kenneth takes acid...He was doing dance motions in one of these robes. He had a gold lamé robe he’d actually made for me for the film. He had his eyes done up in the style of the Egyptians, the eyes of Ra....He was loaded on acid.”⁶⁴³ The footage of this magickal working provides something of a general continuity throughout the film, intersecting at various points; nonetheless, it remains an extremely fractured work. Deborah Alison has stated: “Of the films in the *Magick Lantern Cycle*, this is the most hermetic and provides the greatest problems of comprehension for the non-initiate.”⁶⁴⁴ I would argue, however, that it does not matter whether one comprehends the meanings of the occult symbols within their hermetic ideological context, as the work is in itself a stunning piece of filmmaking. On the level of representation, there is much in the film’s imagery that is testament to its psychedelic ethos, and, concurrent with the Sixties illuminative or ‘consciousness expanding’ motivation behind much drug use, it is quite clear the

⁶⁴³ Bobby Beausoleil, quoted in Landis, *Anger*, p. 156.

⁶⁴⁴ Deborah Alison, “Magick in Theory and Practice: Ritual Use of Colour in Kenneth Anger’s *Invocation of My Demon Brother*,” in *Senses of Cinema*, no. 34 (2004): http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2005/34/invocation_demon_brother/.

film's intended function in relation to the spectator is implicitly psychedelic. In the words of Leo Goldsmith:

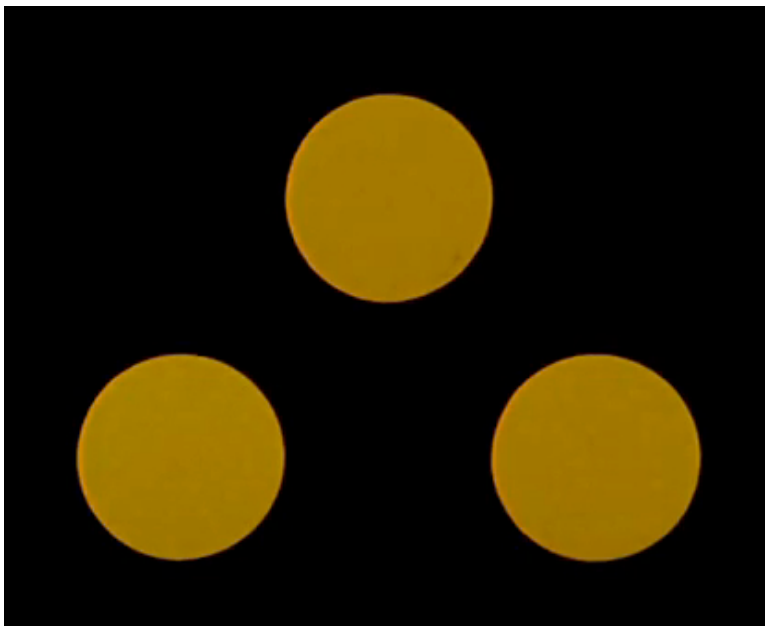
Kenneth Anger's own appearance in the film, as a character called the Magus, provides the most explicit indication of the film's intentions for the spectator...As an "invocation," the film both documents Anger's performance of this rite and *enacts* it, which is to say that the film itself is the rite that invokes the "demon brother." Not only do we view Anger as the Magus performing the mass — ritualistically burning Aleister Crowley's Laws of Oz, brandishing a false goat's head, and waving about a Nazi swastika flag — but also his film performs this incantation directly upon us.⁶⁴⁵

This illuminative intent is illustrated from the very start of the work, with the film opening with the presentation of a geometric pattern of three circles forming a pyramid. From investigating Crowley's system, one learns that it is an occult symbol that refers to the ascent from matter to spirit, with the reverse symbol indicating the opposite; as such, the contrary symbol projected downward is the very last image of the film. I argue Anger is symbolically suggesting that the process that we, the spectators, are about to engage in through the viewing of the film itself, is the heightening of consciousness, and its subsequent grounding to 'reality' with the screening of the opposing symbol at the conclusion of the film. In recalling Anger's statement of trying to engage the viewer in an alternate reality,⁶⁴⁶ I believe this provides a strong indication of the motivation behind the use of such symbolic forms within the work. To be more specific in relation to Anger's belief system, the three circles represent the supernal triad of the Sephiroth in the Quabalah - Binah (understanding), Chockmah (wisdom), and Kether (pure

⁶⁴⁵ Leo Goldsmith, "Invocation of My Demon Brother," in *Not Coming to a Theatre Near You* (16th October, 2007): <http://www.notcoming.com/reviews/invocationofmydemonbrother/>.

⁶⁴⁶ Tony Rayns and John Ducane, "Dedication to Create Make Believe," p. 48.

spirit).⁶⁴⁷ Importantly for our present concerns, it is also a symbolic representation of what the Quabbalists saw as the tendency of the universe to converge towards unity. Another important fact for our consideration is that the upward pointing triangle in occult philosophy also represents the element of fire, which is indicative of the sensory assault that is to come. Indeed, we must remember, Anger's magickal motto is "Force and Fire."⁶⁴⁸



Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969)

Whilst the former points are somewhat superfluous to this current investigation, the fact that the symbol is indicative of the aspiration for unity and wholeness is particularly pertinent, given the nature of our thematic concerns regarding the search for the 'true self' – or more conventionally expressed, the authentic self. From the onset of the film, the symbol explicitly represents the underlying core Sixties drive towards such unity, and whilst it is an occult symbol whose meaning

⁶⁴⁷ In Crowley's magickal paradigm, the triad also represents a vision of the holy guardian angel: the union with such an entity being the desired goal of much magickal endeavour; akin to Jungian individuation.

⁶⁴⁸ Please see Appendix.

would only be known by initiates of the occult arts, or by those – as in the case of the present author - who have researched its symbolic particularities, its intention regarding the function of the film remains explicit.

Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969) is, in Anger's own words, "an attack on the sensorium."⁶⁴⁹ Landis eloquently describes it as "a terroristic mosaic. The amount and degree of superimpositions are so highly developed that the images hammer at the viewer's subconscious with machine-gun rapidity."⁶⁵⁰ As Powell points out, "its fragmentary nature...is its chief strength in mounting Anger's 'attack on the sensorium.'"⁶⁵¹ There is the implicit denial of any comforting framework of sequential logic to the images. The film utilises a complex array of intercutting and flash-frame images, with sensory bombardment being unremitting throughout the entirety of the work. It is, above all, an intensely confusing and visceral film. Crucially, the undermining of conventional or stable modes of consciousness lies at the heart of the work itself, as is the manner of the Sixties politics of consciousness. There are numerous examples that may be cited to illustrate the manner in which the film is a continuous assault on the spectator's cognitive faculties. One of the recurrent shots used in the work is footage of a US helicopter setting down a troop of marines in Vietnam. Powell states that within this sequence

Anger printed one continuous loop of film on a C roll played simultaneously to the other two rolls. He has suggested that this image, which we only consciously register twice, is visible throughout the film with the help of infra-red glasses. The footage is intended to heighten the viewer's anxiety. Anger believes that audiences will sense the flow of men through the film, even when they are unable to see them. By

⁶⁴⁹ Anger, quoted in Rayns, "A Kenneth Anger Kompendium," p. 33.

⁶⁵⁰ Landis, *Anger*, p. 171.

⁶⁵¹ Powell, "The Occult: A Torch For Lucifer," p. 84.

this, the viewer's cognitive search for recognisable forms and patterns is blocked and the mastery of spectatorship is subverted.⁶⁵²

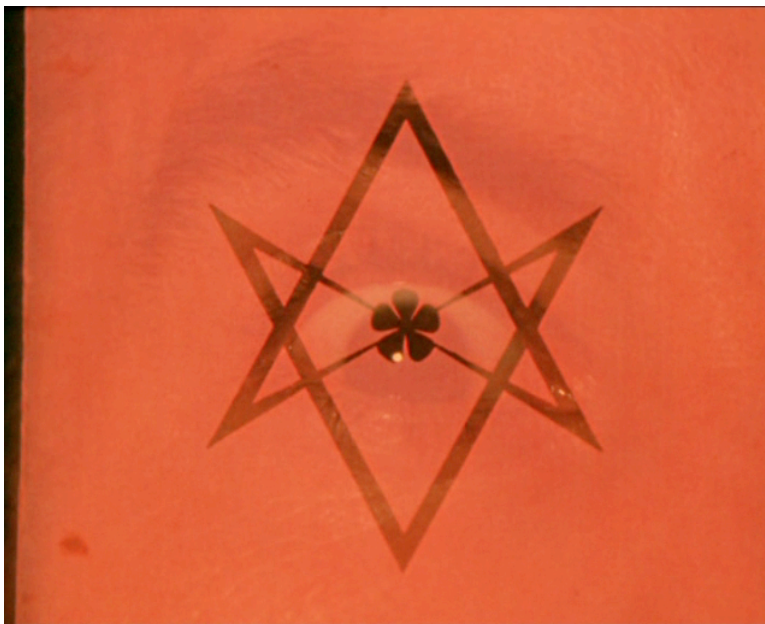


Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969)

The archetypal filmic method of spectator manipulation – the subliminal cut – is given its fullest expression by Anger within this piece. It is utilised throughout the work as a direct attempt to undermine the spectator's conscious control. While the subliminal cut has long been discredited as a mode of manipulating the spectator, during the Sixties in particular it was deemed a highly effective filmic inculcator. Numerous examples may be cited, but one sequence is particularly illustrative. We are presented with a close up of a human eye, with the Egyptian eye of Ra superimposed over the centre of the image. The superimpositions are so exquisitely composed that they establish the centrality of the power of vision. We then cut to an almost subliminal shot of Crowley's primary ideological symbol –

⁶⁵² Powell, "The Occult: A Torch for Lucifer," pp. 84-86.

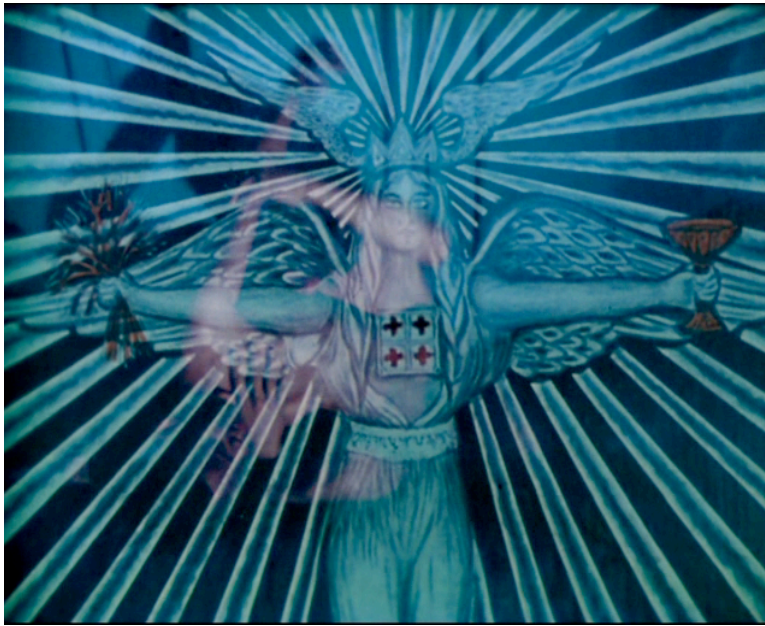
'the Unicursal Hexagram' - which has a flower at its centre, positioned over the eye itself, and is the vortex of power for this particular hermetic symbol.



Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969)

The next shot is made up of multiple superimpositions of two naked boys wrestling, metamorphosing into a multiplicity of co-becoming; indeterminate subjectivity in a mass of flailing limbs. This image is distinctly ambiguous with

regard to the state of naturalism and abstraction; the human body the clay of such playful moulding. During this sequence there is another, almost subliminal cut, of a painting of a woman holding a chalice and a bundle of branches. This image, according to James Eschelman, “is a representation of God in Malkuth”⁶⁵³



Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969)

This icon is a representation of the call for divine enlightenment within the confines of the material realm (Malkuth). We have through this particular image the symbolic representation of divine experience, conveyed to us in a manner that we may ‘understand’ – or more appropriately - absorb on the unconscious level. We can therefore determine its intended use as a catalyst for further development for those of us in the normal waking realm of lived experience.

⁶⁵³ James Eschelman, *The Magickal and Mystical System of the AA* (California: College of Thelema, 2008), p. 105,

Even in the slower sequences of the film – of which there are few – the ever-present monotony of the soundtrack undermines any form of psychological stability. The thematic concern of vision is present throughout the work, with eyes, or symbols of eyes, playing a prominent role; indicative of the form of the work itself – the spectator's eye is left to experience the powerful, perplexing effect of the film's imagery, with scant recourse to logical cognisance. The film is overwhelmingly saturated in intensely psychedelic aesthetic imagery, a hypnotic, mesmerising, and abrasive soundtrack, and, crucially, overtly jarring yet rhythmic editing; creating an intensive, immersive, sensorial overload. The editing is somewhat akin to the work of Kurt Kren and his recordings of the Viennese Actionists, albeit at a particularly lower cut-ratio. The film's effect upon the audience is one of overwhelming delirium, and is specifically engineered to be so. It is a direct attack upon 'normal', stabilised modalities of consciousness. The film is explicit in its representational undermining of social norms and release of latent psychic potentiality – for example, in relation to sexuality – but more subtle methods are at work within the film. The form of the piece – the manner in which it is such a fractured, multifaceted bombardment of the senses – is an expression of the Sixties impulse to break with the normalcy of linear psychological existence; to fracture the stable, rational, inauthentic modalities of consciousness, in order that a more primal truth be uncovered. Hutchinson aptly states this when she writes of the work:

Perhaps at his most experimental, Anger moves further away from the stylistic tropes that are synonymous with narrative-driven mainstream cinema, and deeper into the hermetic realms of artifice, symbol, subliminal communication, and spatio-temporal disjuncture. It attests to the fact that few filmmakers other than Anger have been brave (or imaginative enough) to acknowledge, technically employ, and

materialize the rapturous, elemental possibilities of film for taking us beyond verisimilitude: exploring to what extent reality and naturalism are just states of perception.⁶⁵⁴

As is the norm with Crowley's rhetoric, it is clothed in dark language, but in essence the intent is actually liberatory, as the 'Demon Brother' of the title represents the 'authentic self'. Whilst the form of the work is immensely dark, at the heart of Anger's practice is a liberatory essence; that of the recognition, engagement, and assertion of being.

The form of the film is a distinct departure from Anger's previous work, with Sitney eloquently describing how the piece "marks a stylistic change and a refinement of Anger's Romanticism. Stylistically he shifts from the closed form of his earlier films, to a more open form."⁶⁵⁵ However, the work follows a pattern that is implicitly schizoid in its jarring relationships. As Sitney has already highlighted, one shot does not necessarily relate to the other in any meaningful form;⁶⁵⁶ it is a pure example of indeterminacy and heterogeneity. Multiple superimpositions are used throughout, confusing any sense of normative stability, with shots being composed by numerous levels of complex multi-layering. The collage of images undermines any sense of continuity, let alone narrative; the film is essentially a heterogeneous assemblage of moving images which confuse and bewilder the spectator's cognitive faculties, leaving little time for us to collect our thoughts in reflective recourse. The confusion imposed on the spectator evokes a state of constant flux; it is that of intense delirium.

⁶⁵⁴ Alice Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 164.

⁶⁵⁵ Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 128.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

One of the most affecting and recurrent images within the work is that of an albino. The footage concentrates predominantly upon the flickering of the albino's eyes, which Landis has ascribed to "a peak LSD experience."⁶⁵⁷ Whatever the source of the phenomena, the footage is extremely emblematic of the larger work itself. Within the chaotic nature of the film there is nothing to suggest coherency; there is no centre of stability, much like the eye of the albino; the status of the inert nature of consciousness is distinctly disrupted, it is a 'jarring awake', a total disruption of the audience's normal modalities of perceptual cognisance, fragmenting and calling into question the responsibility of the spectator to construct coherent meaning; it is implicitly schizoid. Anger's film is a direct assault on rationality, reason, and linear logic.



Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969)

⁶⁵⁷ Landis, *Anger*, p. 171.

Within Sixties psychedelic moving-image art, the derangement of habitual modes of perception was the primary methodology for the attempted alteration of consciousness. As previously stated, psychedelic aesthetic processes were “used to overwhelm the senses and derange habitual modes of perception.”⁶⁵⁸ This particular strain of Sixties film – of which Anger’s work is an explicit example – was made with the intention of not just celebrating the psychedelic experience, but creating as close an approximation as one could to the experience itself, in order to effect some degree of psychical liberation of the subject, however fleeting. These were works that “by staying in tune with the psychedelic experience, attempted to cross the sensory threshold and generate a profound disturbance of everyday consciousness and perception.”⁶⁵⁹ In this breaking down of habitual modes of perception, the aim was to obtain a state of authenticity. Poirier offers a more detailed description of the common formal qualities that can be identified within psychedelic art. In doing so he highlights (crucially, for the politics of consciousness of the Sixties) the manner in which the works attempted to undermine the conventional modes of rationalist consciousness, when he argues the defining features of “this specific corpus would...be characterized by works that consciously go against constructivist rationality and disturb the conventional forms of the *gestalt* by various processes.”⁶⁶⁰

The sensorial delirium that is invoked by works such as Anger’s *Invocation of my Demon Brother* (1969) is highly illustrative of wider discourses surrounding the approach to psychical transformation relative to the psychedelic art of the Sixties.

Within Sixties discourse, psychedelia, mysticism, and the total breaking down of

⁶⁵⁸ Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, p. 74.

⁶⁵⁹ Poirier, “Hyper-Optical and Kinetic Stimulation,” p. 282.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

the self-conscious, stable subject – more explicitly, ‘madness’ - were all thought to be closely intertwined. Crucially, Laing saw a distinct “analogy between the psychotic and psychedelic states, between the schizophrenic’s withdrawal and the mystic’s other-worldliness.”⁶⁶¹ Lachman also writes of such correlations, describing Laing’s “belief in madness as a kind of existential rebirth (much like Leary saw the psychedelic experience).”⁶⁶² The link between ‘madness’, mysticism, and psychoactive substances was particularly strong during the 1960s, yet this specific lineage of scholarly thought can be traced, at least in literature on the subject of psychology, to William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1900).⁶⁶³ Grinspoon describes how

the relationship between psychedelic experience and schizophrenia has excited more than scientific controversy; it was one of the battlefields in the ideological wars of the 1960s. At first this was a simple matter of drug enthusiasts claiming new insights and the opposition denying their validity by calling them products of madness. But then the debate was given a new twist by the antipsychiatry movement associated with R.D Laing.⁶⁶⁴

The ingestion of psychedelic drugs as a ‘deconditioning agent’ was widely believed in the Sixties to prompt an experiential mode that contained distinct elements of the psychotic condition. Indeed, Humphrey Osmond, the psychiatrist who was so crucial in the early medical investigations of psychedelics, originally termed the substance “‘psychodelic.”⁶⁶⁵ Adams recounts how, in 1964, “Harold Abramson remarked that every time someone takes a large dose of LSD-25 he undergoes an

⁶⁶¹ Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 100.

⁶⁶² Lachman, *Turn off Your Mind*, p. 351.

⁶⁶³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁶⁶⁴ Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, p. 251.

⁶⁶⁵ Grunenberg, “The Politics of Ecstasy,” p. 14.

experimental psychosis.”⁶⁶⁶ This position was presented eloquently in Huxley’s

The Doors of Perception:

The schizophrenic is like a man permanently under the influence of mescaline, and therefore unable to shut off the experience of a reality which he is not holy enough to live with, which he cannot explain away because it is the most stubborn of primary facts, and which, because it never permits him to look at the world with merely human eyes, scares him into interpreting its unremitting strangeness, its burning intensity of significance.⁶⁶⁷

Partridge describes how Osmond, as one of the originators of this correlation between the experiential qualities of psychedelics and schizophrenia,

shocked the medical world when he drew attention to the structural similarity between mescaline and adrenaline molecules and then suggested that schizophrenia might be understood as a form of self-intoxication, in that, for some unfortunate people, the body mistakenly produces its own hallucinogens. Moreover, he argued, if this is the case, then mescaline can be used to train medical professionals treating schizophrenia, in that it will enable them to experience the world as their patients do.⁶⁶⁸

Laing also endorsed the use of psychedelics in conjunction with therapy, when the therapist would, together with the patient, ingest LSD and subsequently engage in intense psychotherapeutic processes.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁶ Joe K. Adams, “Psychosis: Experimental and Real,” in *The Psychedelic Review* 1, No. 4, (Cambridge, 1964): <http://www.psychedelic-library.org/adams.htm>.

⁶⁶⁷ Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, p. 34.

⁶⁶⁸ Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 87.

⁶⁶⁹ Whereas most psychoanalysts who utilised psychedelics in the course of their therapy would do so with the aim of providing a safe and comfortable environment for the analysand - the issue of ‘set and setting’ in Leary’s terms - Dr. Salvador Roquet, a Mexican psychoanalyst, consciously sought to induce a ‘bad-trip’ in the patient as part of his ‘therapy’. Roquet presented patients with horrific stimuli while they were under the influence; for example, Jewish subjects were given LSD and then forced to listen to recordings of Hitler’s speeches.

The hypothesis that projected a correlation between the two states, rapidly fell out of favour in the early Seventies, however. Bentall elucidates the issues surrounding the theory that

schizophrenia might be caused by an endogenous neurotoxin. One problem for this theory is that drug-induced hallucinations are usually quite different from those reported by patients in the absence of intoxication. For example, the hallucinations induced by LSD and other drugs usually consist of intense visual experiences involving bright colours, and explosive, concentric, rotational or pulsating movements.⁶⁷⁰

Despite the fact that the correlations between psychedelic experience and psychosis have been discredited, for our purposes it remains a powerful analytical tool with regard to the wider socio-cultural political processes that dominated the Sixties, in that both were seen as powerful representations of the questioning of psychical normalcy that constituted the political question of consciousness. Madness was itself something of a cultural symbol during the Sixties, and I believe it is central to the question of the politics of consciousness. It is important to state that the power of the symbolism dwelt not in the existential torment of madness itself, but rather, in the fact that madness was the emblematic rejection of linear subjectivity, and in this total rejection of stable, linear modes of consciousness, lay the possibility for 'something true' to emerge. Due to the fact that the 'psychopolitics' of the American countercultural movement was propelled by the thesis that what constituted 'normality' was a condition of alienation, of fragmentation, and disarray - a lack of contact with the true, authentic self - it became necessary to look to the 'opposite' end of the spectrum of psychological

⁶⁷⁰ Bentall, *Madness Explained*, p. 354.

'normalcy', in the search for a form of symbolism that would represent total psychical opposition. Hewison writes: "For the counterculture to be presented as a radical alternative to bourgeois civilisation, and not just a marginal adjustment to it, it had to appear in terms at the furthest opposite to the disputed 'normal'."⁶⁷¹ I would argue herein lay the power of madness in Sixties discourse. It is the total rejection of all analytical rationality, and thus, it is the Sixties politics of consciousness countercultural paradigm par excellence.

In the words of Willis: "The study of madness – and specifically of the schizophrenic – was from the start a central and defining image for a cultural revolution in which there were to be only participants and no spectators."⁶⁷² Indeed, the Beats themselves were also very much concerned with madness. Lisa Phillips describes how "their heroes were mad prophets, seers, visionaries."⁶⁷³ In *On the Road*, Kerouac wrote: "The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing."⁶⁷⁴ To those currents opposed to the conception of 'normality', the standard psyche, and the propagation of 'models' for the 'healthy' adapted psyche, madness provided a wonderful form of symbolism. The Sixties psychedelic discourse "permitted no systematic distinction between inspired originality, eccentricity, and madness."⁶⁷⁵ For the Beats, "madness was often privileged over reason. Who determined what was sane and what was not?"⁶⁷⁶ In relation to the question of the politics of

⁶⁷¹ Hewison, *Too Much*, p. 82.

⁶⁷² Willis, "Spontaneous Underground," p. 70.

⁶⁷³ Phillips, "Beat Culture," p. 21.

⁶⁷⁴ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 55.

⁶⁷⁵ Grinspoon, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, p. 82.

⁶⁷⁶ Phillips, "Beat Culture," p. 32.

consciousness, Laing wrote: "The 'normally' alienated person, by reason of the fact that he acts more or less like everyone else, is taken to be sane."⁶⁷⁷

For Anger, the Beats, and the members of the romantic counterculture at large, the dissolution of normative modes of perception was necessary for the possibility of 'something true' to emerge. For them, in moments of madness, the total negation of rationality, sometimes the light breaks through the somnambulistic state of ordinary consciousness. In this manner, progressive counterculturalists such as Laing "place themselves in a relationship of potential identification with the mad insofar as they claim to have a message that cannot be communicated in ordinary ways."⁶⁷⁸ The Surrealists shared with both the Beats and the psychedelic movement a fascination with madness as the emblematic rejection of reason. In the words of Weiss: "The Surrealists' fascination with madness is partially due to the fact that madness is de facto transformation of reality, an escape from the confines of rationality."⁶⁷⁹ Weiss describes how on the cover of

the Surrealist journal *Minotaure* 3-4 (1933) are displayed four Tarot cards, among which is *Le fou*, the madman, or the jester who simulates madness...The madman of the Tarot is in fact emblematic of the Surrealist project, insofar as it is a transformative articulation whereby the entirety of rationality can be modified, disrupted and transformed.⁶⁸⁰

For the latter-day psychedelic movement, it provided an enduring form of symbolism, with Wilson describing how "such a clinical confirmation for the

⁶⁷⁷ Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, p. 24.

⁶⁷⁸ Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 145.

⁶⁷⁹ Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Excess*, p. 89.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89

'revolution in the head' was also embraced by those embarking on the psychedelic journey that would lead - it was hoped - to a renewed engagement with society."⁶⁸¹ That "the psychedelic voyager, journeying through inner space to re-order the self and form a new society, was a corollary of the position of the mad in institutional culture."⁶⁸² This premise is absolutely linked with the Sixties politics of consciousness and the fight against standardised forms of subjectivity. We may again look to the work of Laing's colleague David Cooper:

From the moment of birth most people progress through the social learning situations of family and school until they achieve social normality. Most people are developmentally arrested in this state of normality. Some others break down during this progress and regress to madness...Others, very few, manage to slip through the state of inertia or arrest represented by alienated statistical normality and progress to some extent on the way to sanity, retaining an awareness of the criteria of social normality so that they avoid invalidation. One should note that normality is 'far out' at an opposite pole not only to madness but also to sanity. Sanity approaches madness but an all-important gap, a difference, always remains.⁶⁸³

The more essentialist, mystically inclined, Dr. Richard Alpert - who conducted the first psychedelic experiments at Harvard in the early 60s with Timothy Leary, and was a close friend of Laing - recounts the tale of his encounter with a schizophrenic in a psychiatric hospital, in which direct parallels are drawn between the experience of the schizophrenic and the 'LSD mystic' Alpert:

He was producing voluminous amounts of material, reading Greek, which he had never been able to read. He was doing a number of phenomenal things which the doctors saw as pathological - the fact that he could steal, lie, and cheat, and tell them that he was Christ...My

⁶⁸¹ Wilson, "Spontaneous Underground," p. 70.

⁶⁸² Wilson, "Spontaneous Underground," p. 69.

⁶⁸³ David Cooper, *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 16.

reading of his materials showed me that he was tuned in on some of the greatest truths in the world that have been enunciated by some of the highest beings.⁶⁸⁴

Of the psychedelic experience itself, Mullan writes:

LSD was able to take someone to terrifying experiential states of mind. Places with no exit. Hell. Someone might feel that they were only a fragment, that they were in bits and pieces, wandering around the world aimlessly with nowhere to go. Conversely, such experiences and states of mind tend to be illusory, and they pass. They are transient. The sense of hopelessness that seems permanent disappears. The person emerges from the experience. Then again, what may be experienced is a sense of awe, of wonder, an almost spiritual state.⁶⁸⁵

For Laing, one of the primary influences upon his thesis that madness may be an attempt by the psyche at liberation from a primarily estranged existential condition, was Carl Jung. Laing stated that, although he did not say very much about Jung, he recognised him as the “first person, as far as I’ve come across who, in *Symbols of Transformation*...envisaged a parallel between what was called a psychotic episode and a mythological journey or transformation of the soul, and he called that *metanoia*, borrowing that term from the New Testament word for conversion or repentance as translated.”⁶⁸⁶ What is derived from Jung in the work of Laing is primarily this concept of *metanoia*, which for Laing is construed as the destruction of the alienated ego and the subsequent emergence of an authentic self. An influence upon both Laing and Jung, such a premise can be found in the work of Nietzsche: “There are people who either from lack of experience or out of

⁶⁸⁴ Richard Alpert, quoted in *Exploring Madness*, eds. James Fadiman and Donald Kewman (Monterey, California: Brooks Publishing, 1973), p. 61.

⁶⁸⁵ Mullan, *R.D Laing: Personal View*, p. 75.

⁶⁸⁶ Mullan, *Mad to be Normal*, p. 104.

sheer stupidity, turn away from such phenomena, and, strong in the sense of their own sanity, label them mockingly or pityingly 'Endemic diseases'. These benighted souls have no idea how cadaverous and ghostly their 'sanity' appears."⁶⁸⁷

It must be stressed that I am not suggesting that Anger is attempting to create a state of madness in the spectator – rather, we see the methodological tract, the mode of thinking that explains such an approach. It is perhaps worth noting – although I am not stressing this point – that Anger does have a personal relationship to mental instability. He is in his own words "bipolar,"⁶⁸⁸ "a manic depressive," and even within his films that are not of a schizoid form, there are direct symbolic allusions to madness. Speaking on *Rabbit's Moon* (1950) for example, Anger remarked that that the moon utilised in the work is itself a reference to madness.⁶⁸⁹

The predominant methodology that Anger utilises in his attempt to achieve an altered state of consciousness within the spectator is that of sensory derangement. Despite the rather dubious efficacy of this methodology, the aim of such psychedelic media remains explicit. The method of sensory-overload has been quite rightly criticised in some quarters for its ineffectiveness: a fact I address in due course. As previously stated however, the phenomenological consideration of whether or not films of a psychedelic form actually induce altered states is not the business of this thesis; rather, this work is a consideration of Anger's films within

⁶⁸⁷ Frederick Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music* (New York: Penguin, 1993), p. 23.

⁶⁸⁸ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Gaspar Noé, in Alexandria Symonds, "Gaspar Noé and Kenneth Anger, In the Void Together," *Interview Magazine*, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/blogs/film/2010-10-20/web-exclusive-gaspar-noe-kenneth-anger/>.

⁶⁸⁹ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Michael O'Pray, BFI Audio Archive (17/01/1990), National Film Theatre, Southbank, London.

the wider socio-political spectrum in which they engaged. What is important is that “the ‘protracted, momentous and studied deregulation of all the senses’ which was advocated by Arthur Rimbaud appears to have been revived during the psychedelic era”⁶⁹⁰

Another work that is concerned with overt sensorial assault in order to overload the rational mind is the ‘Dream Machine’. Fellow New Yorkers, Brion Gysin, William Burroughs, and the mathematician and poet Ian Somerville, were responsible for the development of this particular psychedelic contraption. The Dream Machine consisted of a rotating cylinder which was perforated with holes shaped according to a Sufi pattern, through which light from an internal rotating motorised lamp emitted a constant flicker. In combative political language, indicative of the political nature of Sixties consciousness alteration, Burroughs stated of the Dream Machine: “We must storm the citadels of enlightenment, the means are at hand.”⁶⁹¹ In this specific tradition of psychedelic art, the device was created to function as an instrument of consciousness alternation and impartation of visionary experience; one that had a remarkable precedent:

One knows of cases – in French history, Catherine de Medici for example, had Nostradamus sitting on the top of a tower...[he would] flicker his hands over closed eyes, and would interpret his visions in a way that were of influence to her in regard to her political powers...they were like instructions from a higher power...Gysin suggested Saul of Tarsus – St Paul – the most important convert to Christianity, may have encountered the flicker phenomenon on the road to Damascus, where according to the Bible “a light from heaven flashed around him.”⁶⁹²

⁶⁹⁰ Poirier, “Hyper-Optical and Kinetic Stimulation,” p. 299.

⁶⁹¹ John Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience: A Short History of Stroboscopic Light and The Dream Machine* (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2003), pp. 11.

⁶⁹² John Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, pp. 11–12.

Utilising a methodology much akin to the Dream Machine, Tony Conrad, George Maciunas, and Paul Sharits drew upon the innate mechanic processes of the cinematic projector to create their 'Flicker Films', with the intended aim of generating something akin to a hallucinogenic experience. Conrad's film *The Flicker* (1966), the most prominent work of the group, alternated black and white frames to produce a stroboscopic effect with the intention of generating hallucinations in the cinematic spectator. Diedrichsen describes how Conrad, "a filmmaker of politically conceived psychedelics, produced in his film *The Flicker* (1966) what is surely the most radical point of departure for this light politics."⁶⁹³ Moving the timeline forward momentarily, Leary, along with Genesis P-Orridge, produced a digital video piece entitled *How to Operate your Brain* (1993).



How to Operate Your Brain (1994)

The work encapsulates the transformatory ethos that so categorises this mode of aesthetic practice, and in the excerpt of Leary speaking that follows, such intent is

⁶⁹³ Diedrichsen, "Veiling and Unveiling," p. 90.

eloquently illustrated. As a distinct precursor to such digital forms, this is exactly what Anger is attempting to achieve through his practice:

This is an experiment in mind formation, in-formation, forming, controlling, operating your mind and your brain, using digital techniques to overload, scramble, confuse, unfocus your mind...The first thing to do is to overwhelm your focused mind, your linear mind, by overloading signals, digital patterns, clusters of photons and electrons.⁶⁹⁴

(4.2) Madness and The Politics of Consciousness

The psychosis induced by psychedelia was thought to potentially lead to authentic states of consciousness, or hyper-real states. In the words of Adams, "the distinction...between 'transcendental experiences' and "experimental psychoses" is, in my opinion, extremely unfortunate, and has resulted in a failure to recognise the great contribution that can be made by these drugs to an understanding of what we have been calling 'psychosis'."⁶⁹⁵ For Anger's particular belief system, in which there is an idealisation of shamanic cultures, the archetypal shaman would, most likely under our present day psychiatric classifications, be deemed 'mentally unstable'; an assumption which would be reinforced by their regular use of psychedelic plants in shamanic voyages. Underhill writes that such individuals have "thresholds of extraordinary mobility. That is to say, a very slight effort, a very slight departure from normal conditions, will permit their latent or subliminal powers to emerge and occupy the mental field. A 'mobile threshold' may make a

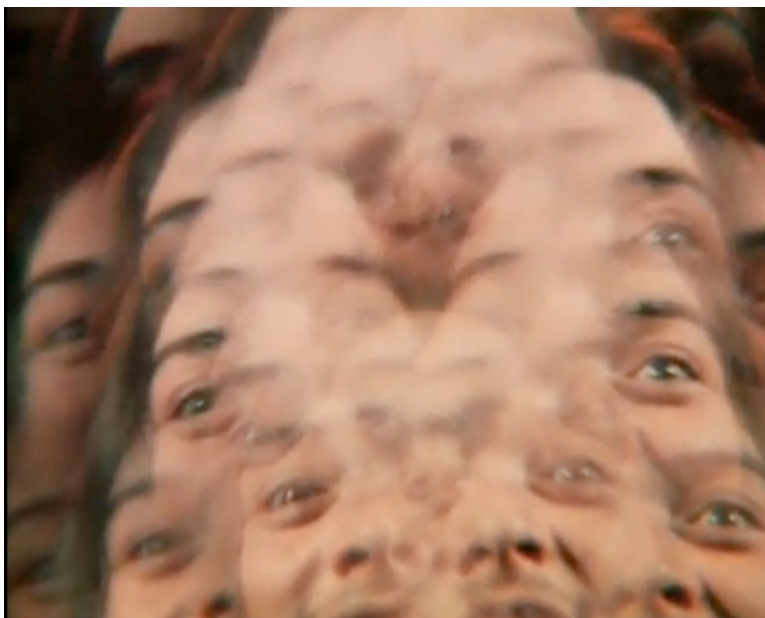
⁶⁹⁴ *How to Operate your Brain*, directed by Joey Cavella and Chris Graves (1994; Retinalogic, Tapeworm Video Distribution) VHS.

⁶⁹⁵ Adams, "Psychosis: Experimental and Real," in *The Psychedelic Review* 1, No. 4, (Cambridge, 1964): <http://www.psychedelic-library.org/adams.htm>.

man a genius, a lunatic, or a saint.”⁶⁹⁶ Indeed, this association has persisted in modern spiritual discourse, as Karin Hannigan writes:

In some cases, the state of emergency due to psychological upheaval is so acute that it resembles a psychotic episode. Many clinicians still regard phenomena associated with spiritual emergence as indicative of pathology because the signs are so easily confused with the indicators of psychosis, mania, depression, schizophrenia or borderline personality disorder.⁶⁹⁷

In a purely representative fashion, the theme of the fractured self is expressed within *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969). Within the piece, Anger uses an anamorphic lens for the kaleidoscopic effect of multiplying a shot of the head of Beausoleil – a common technique in the Sixties to denote psychedelic states of consciousness.



Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969)

⁶⁹⁶ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (Massachusetts: Kessinger Publishing, 2006) p. 158.

⁶⁹⁷ Karin Hannigan, "Kundalini and the Awakening of Spirit, " in *Lycaeum: The Entheogenic Database* (1997): <http://www.lycaeum.org/altered/kundalin/kundawak.htm>.

Heinrich Klüver, a professor of Biological Studies, published in 1966 what is widely considered the seminal study of the various forms of hallucinations that may overtake one during a psychedelic experience. Klüver describes how “we may call them *form-constants*, implying that a certain number of them appear in almost all mescal visions and that many ‘atypical’ visions are upon close examination nothing but variations of these form-constants.”⁶⁹⁸ Klüver’s documentation shows directly how such forms of hallucination have influenced Anger’s work in this instance. Klüver describes how a particular form-constant that

deserves special mention is designated by terms as *tunnel, funnel, alley, cone, or vessel*. To illustrate: ‘Sometimes I seemed to be gazing into a vast revolving vessel, on whose polished concave mother-of-pearl surface the hues were swiftly changing...the field of vision is similar to the interior of a cone the vertex of which is lying in the center of the field directly before the eyes (or vice versa).’⁶⁹⁹

Crucially, an anamorphic lens creates a multiplicity of the image, and with the many faces presented, we see that the multiplicity of subjectivity, the fractured nature of the self, is conveyed here.

For Laing, “when a person goes mad, a profound transposition of his position in relation to all domains of being occurs. His centre of experience moves from ego to Self....The madman is, however, confused. He muddles ego with self, inner and outer, natural and supernatural...An exile from the scene of being as we know it.”⁷⁰⁰ Laing argued not that madness was a desirable state in itself, but rather the

⁶⁹⁸ Heinrich Klüver, *Mescal and the Mechanisms of Hallucinations* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1966) p. 22.

⁶⁹⁹ Klüver, *Mescal and the Mechanisms of Hallucinations*, p. 23.

⁷⁰⁰ Laing, *The Divided Self*, p. 60,

possibility of what could emerge from such an extreme psychological state.

Melechi elucidates:

That Laing was connecting the journey of the schizophrenic with that of the 'voyager' - a term which he adopted from the American psychedelic movement - was indeed clear, but Laing was certainly not claiming that the actual experiences were anything more than comparable. Where the two experiences were connected for Laing was at the level of function: both serving as possible inroads into the transcendental.⁷⁰¹

In relation to Laing, this is a particularly controversial subject, as his place in history is somewhat assured as that of the psychiatrist who saw truth in madness; akin to Artaud.⁷⁰² Much of the criticism of Laing (which has persisted to this day) was based upon the assumption was that he idealised the state of schizophrenia; this was, however, simply not the case. What he saw in the schizophrenic was emblematic of the total rejection of analytic-rationality and the concurrent potential for insight into existential actualities, whilst at the same time never denying the immense suffering that schizophrenia causes to those afflicted, along their families. In Laing's own words:

I have never idealized mental suffering, or romanticized despair, dissolution, torture or terror. I have never said that parents or families

⁷⁰¹ Melechi, "Drugs of Liberation," p. 48.

⁷⁰² Laing was inspired to pursue a career in psychiatry from reading Artaud early in his youth. On the question of 'madness', Artaud writes:

Madmen, above all, are individual victims of social dictatorship. In the name of individuality, which specifically belongs to man, we demand the liberation of these people convicted of sensibility. For we tell you no laws are powerful enough to lock up men who think and act. Without stressing the perfectly inspired nature of the manifestations of certain madmen, in so far as we are capable of appreciating them, we simply affirm that their concept of reality is absolutely legitimate, as are all the acts resulting from it." (Antonin Artaud, "Letter to the Medical Directors of Lunatic Asylums," in *Collected Works: Volume 1* [London: John Calder, 1999], p. 15)

or society 'cause' mental illness, genetically or environmentally. I have never denied the existence of patterns of mind and conduct that are excruciating. I have never called myself an anti-psychiatrist, and have disclaimed the term from when my friend and colleague, David Cooper, introduced it.⁷⁰³

The fact that Laing was frequently mentioned in the same breath as his colleague, David Cooper, did little to help his reputation, when Cooper's latter years descended into extreme radicalism, coinciding with debilitating personal issues.⁷⁰⁴ Mullan describes how in his latter years, "Cooper's politics were becoming increasingly unconventional, his perspective leading him to the somewhat extreme view that schizophrenics could be viewed as proto-revolutionaries useful as foot soldiers in the struggle for liberation."⁷⁰⁵ The controversy that surrounds the 'anti-psychiatry' movement is extremely complex however, and it would appear a great deal of the opposition is rooted in the hegemonic social order's desire to label the anti-psychiatry thesis as subversive. What is important for those who propagated such a thesis, however, is the breaking down of normative modes of perception - the circumvention of the rational mind - and in the schizophrenic mode, as with the psychedelic experience, that is most certainly what is occurring.

For Laing, "it seems that what is most realistic, most sensible, most obvious, most sane, appears to most people to be starry-eyed idealism, absolutely unrealistic, and completely crazy and mad."⁷⁰⁶ Laing's *The Politics of Experience* was central not only in the questioning of the labels applicable to sanity and madness, but perhaps,

⁷⁰³ Laing, *Wisdom, Madness and Folly: The Making of a Psychiatrist* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 8-9.

⁷⁰⁴ Cooper died of chronic alcoholism in 1986.

⁷⁰⁵ Clay, *RD Laing: A Divided Self*, p. 151.

⁷⁰⁶ Ian Sinclair, "When Ginsberg's Circus Rolled into Town, " *The Guardian* (26th Jan 2007): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2007/jan/26/whenginsbergscircusrolledi>

more importantly, to the thesis that the breakdown of rationality that precipitated the form of release from linear modes of subjectivity was, however, understandable within the context of the environment in which they were produced. Kotowicz writes:

This has been his most notorious work and it marked a complete break with the norms of the psychiatric orthodoxy...*The Politics of Experience* presented the public with a completely reversed picture. Laing questioned the actual value system on which our notions of 'madness' and 'normality' are based. He argued that the 'mad' were sometimes more sane than the 'normal'⁷⁰⁷

From a postmodern, Continental perspective, the potentiality latent in schizophrenia as presented by Laing was of seminal importance to Deleuze and Guattari in their *Anti-Oedipus* statement of 1968.⁷⁰⁸ The following quote of Deleuze is lengthy, but I feel in this passage we have a distinct elucidation of Laing's thoughts on the potentiality within the schizophrenic process for existential insight, as well as the suffering that such a process of forced psychical deconstruction of one's world entails. I believe the quote is also illuminating regarding the influence of Laing upon Deleuze and Guattari themselves:

⁷⁰⁷ Kotowicz, *R.D Laing and the Paths of Anti-Psychiatry*, p. 50.

⁷⁰⁸ Deleuze and Guattari also drew heavily upon the work of Lacan in supporting this element of their work. Turkle outlines Lacan's position in relation to anti-psychiatry:

Lacan has expressed views that go far toward supporting anti-psychiatric positions, for example, his oft-cited statement in the *Ecrits* that "Man's being cannot be understood without reference to madness," nor would he be man without carrying madness within him as the limit of his freedom. Psychiatric theory is traditionally based on a pejorative concept of madness in which madness is perceived as a deficit, a *lack* of rationality, a state of being *less* than what one could be...For Lacan, the goal of psychoanalysis is the bringing to awareness of underlying contradictions (what Lacan calls the 'truth of the subject'), which can never be confused with the acceptance of social norms....In the case of anti-psychiatry, Lacan's support comes most directly from the way in which he demolishes the notion that there is a 'normal' self that is autonomous, coherent, its own 'center'. (Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, pp. 145-146)

Jaspers and recently Laing have said something very powerful about this question, even if they haven't been well understood yet. In brief, they have maintained that in this phenomena crudely referred to as madness there are two things: a breaking through, which is to say a sudden light, a wall that is superseded; and then there's a rather different dimension which could be called a collapse....The coexistence of two elements: a kind of intrusion, the arrival of something which is not even expressible, something which is so formidable that it can only be spoken of with difficulty, because it is something repressed in our societies – and therefore it comes close to coinciding with (here's the second element) a collapse.⁷⁰⁹

Despite their debt of acknowledgement⁷¹⁰ to Laing and Karl Jaspers (who was himself a strong influence upon Laing), there are marked differences in the conclusions Deleuze and Guattari draw from this pioneering work. Turkle explains how, for Deleuze and Guattari, whilst much like Laing they do not deny the acute suffering inherent in the condition (the 'collapse' as described by Deleuze) they argue:

The schizophrenic, in the grip of this experience, is in touch with fundamental truths about society...R.D Laing has written on the mad as the sane in an insane world, but his work emphasizes the schizophrenic experience as spiritually privileged. Deleuze and Guattari focus on other aspects....The schizophrenic has not entered the symbolic dimensions: he has not accepted the epistemology of signifier to signified. In Lacan's terms, the schizophrenic has refused to Oedipize.

⁷⁰⁹ Deleuze quoted in Guattari, *Chaosophy*, pp. 65-66.

⁷¹⁰ Deleuze continues:

In the case of Nietzsche, Van Gogh, Artaud, Roussel, Campana, etc., there is a doubtless coexistence of the two elements. First there's an amazing 'breakthrough', a breaching of the wall. Van Gogh, Nerval – and we could cite so many others! – have broken through the wall...have travelled far beyond that point, and speak to us with a voice that is the voice of our future. But the second element is still present in this process: the risk of collapse. We need to consider this danger as fundamental. The two elements are connected....The price extracted is a collapse that must be defined as schizophrenic. The two things are not identical; the 'breakthrough' and the collapse are two different moments. But it would be irresponsible to ignore the danger of collapse in these processes. Even if the risk is perhaps worthwhile. (Deleuze, quoted in Guattari, *Chaosophy*, p.)

Deleuze and Guattari point out that by virtue of this refusal he remains close to the primitive truth of the desiring-machines, not trapped within the Oedipal prison in which the complexity and fluidity of the unconscious are distorted, frozen, and flattened.⁷¹¹

Unfortunately, Turkle again perpetuates the myth that Laing deemed those ‘mad’ to be ‘sane’, an assumption that runs throughout her work on the subject. Despite this, much like Laing, Deleuze and Guattari present the schizophrenic

as someone whose language is particularly transparent to the real connections between the language of the unconscious and the language of race, class, police repression, student revolt, rape, and war, that is to say, the language of politics. The schizophrenic does not have a successful Oedipalization to wall him off from the connections between self and society. These same connections are present in each of us, but most people never see them.⁷¹²

Laing, however, “regarded the psychotic’s experience of an alien reality as something akin to a mystical apprehension: it is not ‘the effulgence of a pathological process’ but the faithful reflection of another actuality which is concealed from us by the blinkers of our mundane civilisation,”⁷¹³ as Sedgwick describes. Melechi recounts how *The International Times* – fervent supporters of Laing – described how his most famous patient, Mary Barnes, “was placed in the mystical tradition of St Teresa, describing her as a ‘remarkably sane woman’ who demonstrated that ‘the few sane people in our society are those who have experienced, out of break-down, a kind of resurrection.’”⁷¹⁴ Norman O. Brown – a

⁷¹¹ Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 150.

⁷¹² Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 153.

⁷¹³ Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 97.

⁷¹⁴ International Times (April 25 – May 8, 1969): p. 5, quoted in Melechi, *Psychodelia Britannica*, p. 49.

contemporary of Laing and Marcuse - appears to distinctly romanticise the position of the schizophrenic in his work *Love's Body*, but I believe it is worth quoting in order to see the culmination of such a mode of thinking:

It is not schizophrenia but normalcy that is split-minded: in schizophrenia the false self boundaries are disintegrating. The schizophrenic is suffering from the Truth. The schizophrenic world is one of mystical participation; an 'indescribable extension of inner sense'; 'uncanny feelings of reference'; occult psychosomatic influences and powers.⁷¹⁵

It is perhaps important to note the relation to the romantic concerns of occultism of which Brown writes, as Sedgwick comments how, "in Laing's celebration of the schizophrenic we sometimes find hints of the traditional literary figure of the Holy Fool, the crazed seer, the Cassandra or Poor Tom whose disjointed prophecies condemn a society ripe for judgement."⁷¹⁶ Sedgwick draws an important parallel here with Laing's more romantic leanings and those of the particular romanticism of Anger and Crowley. For Crowley, madness was directly associated with both mysticism and psychedelic substances. Both Crowley and Laing argue for the validity of 'divine madness'; that which is totally divorced from reason. For Crowley, references to madness as evidence of divine truth flow throughout his work: "Only madness, divine madness, offers an issue,"⁷¹⁷ and "attainment is insanity."⁷¹⁸ In the Tarot Deck – perhaps the central cosmological reference for occult beliefs – 'The Fool' is arguably the most important card; one that epitomises the joyous, egoless archetype. In the words of Lon Milo DuQuette: "The Fool is

⁷¹⁵ Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 94.

⁷¹⁶ Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 99.

⁷¹⁷ Crowley, *The Book of Thoth (Egyptian Tarot)* (New York: US Game Systems, Inc., 1979), p. 57.

⁷¹⁸ Crowley, *The Magickal Record of the Beast 666: The Journals of Aleister Crowley* (Quebec: Next Step Publications, 1972), p. 86.

perfectly empty-headed, for if there were anything inside, his innocence would be destroyed.”⁷¹⁹ Tellingly, within the card itself, whilst the Fool is transfixed by the divine light of the sun, he is poised on the edge of a precipice. One could interpret this as the collapse that Deleuze spoke of inherent in schizophrenia.⁷²⁰



The Fool in the Tarot Deck

⁷¹⁹ Lon Milo DuQuette, *Understanding Aleister Crowley's Thoth Tarot* (Boston, MA: Weiser Books, 2003), p. 97.

⁷²⁰ I am not suggesting that Deleuze's thoughts on schizophrenia are comparable to Crowley's; rather, that there are certain affinities suggested in the manner both argue there are potentialities for insight within the state itself. What I am suggesting is that the potentiality positioned as being within madness might be comparable. Although I am not suggesting this avenue of enquiry, there has been a scholarly attempt to link the thought of Deleuze with that of occult thought. Deleuze's primary philosophical influences, Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson, were both very familiar with magick – the latter's sister was even married to Samuel Liddel Mathers, head of the occult society 'The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. In addition to this, Christian Kerslake's *Deleuze and the Unconscious* (London: Continuum, 2007) details Deleuze's debt to specific elements of occult thought.

This is a very particular Sixties outlook, yet one that holds much weight within the critical discourses expounded by Laing and the combined efforts of Deleuze and Guattari. As Sedgwick further highlights:

It appears that the psychotic condition may enable one to overcome a deep rift in the human personality, characteristic of 'normal people' in our type of society. Modern civilisation has created a fissure between the 'inner' and the 'outer' layers of existence, between 'me-here' - and 'you-there', between 'mind' and 'body'. These divisions of personality are not inevitable or natural, but the outcome of 'an historically conditioned split': we can conceive of a point in human existence before this lapse from fusion occurred, an 'original Alpha and Omega of experience and reality' to whose one-ness the mystic and the schizophrenic both manage to return....alienation and splitting are indeed the basic conditions of our repressive normality and its apparatus of anti-humanistic institutions.⁷²¹

This view, as articulated in the *Politics of Experience*, had a profound cultural impact amid the climate of Sixties psychedelia. Indeed, the tract that expresses the view that productive virtues may emerge in the condition of extreme mental illness has a long history, and can be traced back, not least in recorded testament, to Plato:

Madness, provided it comes as the gift of heaven, is the channel by which we receive the greatest blessings...The men of old who gave things their names saw no reproach or disgrace in the madness; otherwise, they would not have connected it with the name of the noblest of arts, the art of discerning the future, and called it the manic art...So, according to evidence provided by our ancestors, madness is a nobler thing than sober sense...madness comes from God, whereas sober sense is merely human.⁷²²

⁷²¹ Sedgwick, *Psychopolitics*, p. 97.

⁷²² Plato, quoted in Karen Redfield, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1993), p. 51.

It is crucial not to romanticise the condition of schizophrenia, yet Laing exemplified – and in essence set in motion throughout the 1960s – the wider countercultural assumption that some productive virtues may reveal themselves within the schizophrenic state. Peter Chadwick, himself a contemporary Professor of Psychology (who is vocal about his past condition of schizophrenia, and whose main project has been to propose to mainstream psychiatry that virtuous elements may emerge within the condition), states of the period to which he owes much of his own thought: “The thinking of Laing and also of Carl Jung – although neither of them articulated it very fully or clearly – is that psychosis, or at least the very edges of psychosis, where one might be said to be ‘super sane’ rather than insane, can give one a profound insight into the nature of reality.”⁷²³ Burston clearly articulates Laing’s position in relation to this matter:

“Normal” people can be both ontologically secure *and* enveloped in social fantasy systems. They can be relatively sane with respect to their dealings with other individuals and their attitudes toward their own bodies, but quite deluded in their deeper grasp of existential actualities, although their beliefs, socially sanctioned, cause no anxiety. Meanwhile, mad people, who have lost the conventional social filters, may be perplexing or intolerable to most of us, but they do sometimes apperceive truths about social reality that are glimpsed only by poets and prophets in moments of *derealization*, when the scales fall from their eyes and the wretched truth is laid bare.⁷²⁴

In the consideration of the modernism/postmodernism divide within the politics of consciousness, I believe a consideration of Deleuze and Guattari’s thoughts on the subject is highly beneficial. It must be stressed here that the aforementioned

⁷²³ Peter K. Chadwick, *Schizophrenia: The Positive Perspective: Explorations at the Outer Reaches of Human Experience* (Hove, East Sussex: Routledge, 2009), p. 5.

⁷²⁴ Burston, *The Crucible of Experience*, p. 220.

writers are not arguing for the validity of the schizophrenic state in the clinical sense. Read from the Laingian, modernist influenced perspective – and that of Anger himself – the importance lies with the fracturing of the false sense of self, in order that one may find a more authentic mode of being. For Deleuze and Guattari, the ‘schizophrenic’ individual “produces himself as a free man, irresponsible, solitary, and joyous, finally able to say and do something simple in his own name, without asking permission; a desire lacking nothing, a flux that overcomes barriers and codes, a name that no-longer designates any ego whatever.”⁷²⁵ The process of such a dissolution is described by Powell as a “‘death of the subject that leads to replenished life. In order to attain true individuality and acquire a ‘proper name’, a subjective death must be undergone via the harshest exercise in de-personalisation’, opening up to multiplicity and its intensities, because experimentation on ourselves is our only identity.”⁷²⁶ Crucially, for the counterculture project of the politics of consciousness, such a state lies on the threshold of a ‘normative’, or what is psychoanalytically determined to be, an acclimatised state. In Deleuze’s words, we must “go a short way further to see for ourselves, be a little alcoholic, a little crazy, a little suicidal, a little guerrilla - enough to extend the crack, but not enough to deepen it irredeemably.”⁷²⁷ As Deleuze and Guattari state in *Thousand Plateaus*, “where psychoanalysis says, “Stop, find your self again,” we should say instead, “Let’s go further still, we haven’t found our BwO yet, we haven’t sufficiently dismantled our self.”⁷²⁸ In the words of Graham Coulter-Smith and Jane Magon:

⁷²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 142.

⁷²⁶ Deleuze quoted in Powell, *Altered States*, p. 83.

⁷²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London New York: Verso, 1998), p. 157.

⁷²⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 167.

When the grid stretches to breaking point, the ego cracks and the social self dies. The ego dissolves into the body without organs in an ultimate cathartic gesture wherein the body rejects all of the mechanisms which inscribe and channel its energies; mechanisms regarded, metaphorically, as organs...This is the suicide of self...This suicidal expulsion of the mechanisms which inscribe the body leaves an undifferentiated flux of libidinal intensities which constitutes the body without organs.⁷²⁹

This act, for Deleuze and Guattari, is that of a de-territorialisation; the body no longer a functionalised 'map', codified and reductively semiologised by Western society, but rather a free collusion of pure forces and affects, unbound by the anatomical metaphor of the organic structure; truly a body without organs.

(4.3) Madness and Mysticism: The Shamanic Tract

The profound insight into reality that could be apprehended through the psychedelic journey was believed in the Sixties to be related to the mystical experience. For writers that subscribed to this proposition, "LSD could, in short, forge a mystical union between self and world."⁷³⁰ Psychedelic substances can be utilised in a shamanic, ritualised context;⁷³¹ an activity that was frequently undertaken by our ancestors, and continues to this day as a formal cultural activity. Anger's practice is following in a distinct tradition, as Hutchinson aptly describes how "the connection between religion, trance, ritual and hypnosis aided

⁷²⁹ Graham Coulter-Smith and Jane Magon, "Mike Parr's Self Portraits: Unma(s)king the Self," *Eyeline* 5 (Brisbane: Visual Arts, June, 1988): <http://members.optusnet.com.au/~robert2600/mparr.html>.

⁷³⁰ Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven*, p. 63.

⁷³¹ For a detailed study of the use of psychedelics as a shamanic tool, please see Terrence McKenna, *Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge* (New York: Bantam, 1993).

by mind-expanding substances, has been widespread from the beginning of time in the rituals and trances of most cultures – shamanistic to Dionysian traditions – from Tibetan Buddhists, to Aztecs, ancient Egyptians, and practitioners of the occult.”⁷³² The connection between the use of intoxicants and more esoteric forms of spiritual practice is distinct; an association that has an important history. Golder describes how

mushrooms eaten by Siberian shamans caused convulsions. Hallucinogens, perhaps mushrooms, were used by worshippers in the Eleusinian mysteries. Possessed by Apollo, the Delphic oracle went into paroxysms after intoxication by fumes from a cleft in the earth. Fault lines have recently been identified in the bedrock at Delphi by an archaeologist and geologist, who speculate that the priestess was maddened by oozing petrochemical vapors like ethylene.⁷³³

Metzner describes how “the use of hallucinogens as an adjunct to yogic practices is known to this day in India, among certain Shaivite sects in particular.”⁷³⁴ Some commentators have even speculated that intoxicant substances may have been the catalysts for the foundation of religious doctrine. Sadie Plant writes of

the extent to which psychoactive substances have continued to inform theistic beliefs in a purely immaterial realm, a spiritual home in which the human soul might one day find truth, liberation, enlightenment. There are, for example, suggestions that the notion of transubstantiation has its sources with ancient mushroom cults, and that the visions of St Teresa of Avila and many other Christian mystics were aided, if not primarily induced, by the accidental or deliberate use of psychoactive substances.⁷³⁵

⁷³² Hutchinson, *Kenneth Anger*, p. 156.

⁷³³ Camille Paglia, “Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s,” in *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 10, No. 3, (December, 2003): p 89.

⁷³⁴ Ralph Metzner, “The Role of Psychoactive Plant Medicine,” in *Hallucinogens: A Reader*, ed. Charles S. Grob (Penguin Putnam, 2002), p. 35.

⁷³⁵ Plant, *Writing on Drugs*, p. 100.

The connection between religion and mind-altering substances has been widespread from the beginning of recorded history, and has been testified by numerous seminal works on the subject, including, but certainly not limited to, *Hallucinogens and Culture*,⁷³⁶ *Entheogens and the Future of Religion*,⁷³⁷ *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*,⁷³⁸ and other such academic works of particular credence and value.

This widespread interest in both mysticism and LSD had a significant impact upon the counterculture of the US within the Sixties: "Many people in the acid world have taken up the occult sciences, *I Ching*, tarot cards, astrology, and numerology. Their interest flows from their acid experiences which, they believe, have given them new sensitivities and glimpses of ways of knowing, and feeling that the categorical rationalism of the West fails to pick up or even denies."⁷³⁹ With regard to Anger, Crowley was a distinct exponent of the utilisation of drugs as a means towards consciousness alteration within a spiritual context. Along with Thomas De Quincy's 1821 classic *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*,⁷⁴⁰ and Baudelaire's *The Poem of Hashish*,⁷⁴¹ Crowley provided a variety of distinctive literature governing the use (and abuse) of drugs, as demonstrated by his works *Diary of a Drug Fiend*⁷⁴² and *The Psychology of Hashish: An Essay on Mysticism*.⁷⁴³ Crowley's own effort, *The Psychology of Hashish*, is an interesting essay that bears a degree of

⁷³⁶ Peter T. Furst, *Hallucinogens and Culture* (San Francisco: Chandler and Sharp, 1976).

⁷³⁷ R. Forte, *Entheogens and the Future of Religion* (San Francisco: Council on Spiritual Practices, 1997).

⁷³⁸ Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

⁷³⁹ Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, p. 86.

⁷⁴⁰ Thomas De Quincy, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (London: Popular Classics, 1997).

⁷⁴¹ Charles Baudelaire, *The Poem of Hashish* (Kessinger, 2004).

⁷⁴² Crowley, *Diary of A Drug Fiend* (York Beach: Weiser, 1971).

⁷⁴³ Crowley, *The Psychology of Hashish: An Essay on Mysticism* (Edmonds, WA: Holmes Publishing, 2001).

resemblance to Walter Benjamin's writings on the subject; although the 'profane illumination'⁷⁴⁴ Benjamin writes of is replaced by a spiritual interpretation.

Writing in 1963, Israel Regardie describes how

recent years have evolved a roster of new and eloquent voices to corroborate and confirm many of Crowley's once outrageous views relative to psychedelic agents: Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert – to name but a few... are directing attention to the dramatic fact that there is now a chemical door which gives promise to open to higher and mystical states of consciousness. This is what Crowley, amongst other things, had been trying to state more than a half a century ago.⁷⁴⁵

The utilisation of intoxicant substances within a ritualised context - as a catalyst for spiritual transformation - was staunchly advocated by Aldous Huxley, and subsequently, to an almost outrageous level by Leary. Psychedelic substances were thought to act as something of a 'truth serum', providing the user with a spiritual, numinous experience. This is illustrated in the variations upon the terminology used for psychedelic substances, as highlighted by Metzner:

An alternate term that has been proposed is *entheogenic*, "releasing (or generating) the deity within"...For someone whose conscious intension is a psychospiritual transformation, the psychedelic *can* be a catalyst that reveals and releases insight or knowledge from higher aspects of our being. This is, I believe, what is meant by *gnosis* – sacred knowledge, insight concerning the fundamental spiritual realities of the universe in general.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin, *On Hashish*, ed. Marcus Book (Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁷⁴⁵ Israel Regardie, *Roll Away the Stone: An Introduction to Aleister Crowley's Essays on the Psychology of Hashish* (California: Newcastle, 1994), p. 4.

⁷⁴⁶ Metzner, "Psychoactive Plant Medicine," in *Hallucinogens: A Reader*, ed. Charles S. Glob (New York: Putnam, 2002), p. 30-31.

This form of spiritually inflected psychedelic ideology promoted the assumption that “a transformed way of life would be built on the intimations provided by LSD, the ‘mind detergent’ that purged the psyche and midwifed a personal rebirth as the first step toward a new form of community.”⁷⁴⁷

The use of psychedelics in a spiritual paradigm is implicitly linked with the political consideration of consciousness; one that was fought in battles prior to the Sixties, and a question that is directly related to the maintenance of power structures, as Pinchbeck describes:

Psychedelic drugs and visionary plant sacraments have been used by indigenous cultures and tribal groups across the world for many thousands— probably tens of thousands—of years, but the use of such substances was suppressed and forgotten by the modern West until the twentieth century. From medieval times, Christian Europe demonized the direct pursuit of gnosis, or spiritual knowledge....Access to spiritual truth was reserved for an elite priest class, trained to transmit the moral directives of the Bible to the masses. European imperialism continued the war against other ways of knowing, other forms of consciousness and belief systems—shamans were often killed and native knowledge systems explicitly targeted for destruction by the colonial powers.⁷⁴⁸

It was the assertion of such writers that “psychedelic drugs opened to mass tourism mental territories previously explored only by small parties of particularly intrepid adventurers, mainly religious mystics.”⁷⁴⁹

In the arena of San Francisco psychedelic film, the most obvious examples of moving-image art that followed the spiritual strain of psychedelic ideology were

⁷⁴⁷ Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, p. 71.

⁷⁴⁸ Pinchbeck, “Embracing the Archaic,” p. 49.

⁷⁴⁹ Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, p. 86.

'The Vortex Concerts' screened at the Morrison Planetarium. They included John Whitney's films; what he termed 'visual music', utilising techniques to synthesise coloured abstract images and sounds; along with films by his younger brother James, who produced a series of abstract films influenced by Buddhism, Carl Jung and mysticism, which used the abstract mandalic patterns associated with Eastern spiritual practice. Jordan Belson, a student of Buddhism and yoga who had also experimented extensively with hallucinogens, was a key participant of the Vortex Concerts. *Phenomena* (1965) epitomises Belson's concern with the loss of ego identity that is central to all Eastern and Eastern influenced spiritual practice; as indeed it is a primary interpretative mechanism for spiritually inclined participants in the psychedelic experience. According to Belson, the aim of the film is, "de-personalisation, the shattering of the ego-bound consciousness, perhaps through death, perhaps through evolution or rebirth."⁷⁵⁰

However, before we stray too far in consideration of 'spiritual truth' (a dubious concept in itself), perhaps a more measured analysis of this particular spiritual strain of psychedelic ideology is needed. Rather than a belief in the implicit connectivity between psychedelics and spirituality, Austin offers a more culturally based and material explanation; one that draws on the immense influence of Aldous Huxley upon Sixties culture:

The Huxley circle's association of the psychedelic experience with mysticism (particularly Eastern mysticism) established one of the dominant interpretative frameworks taken up by the young countercultural acidheads who came later. This is one of the sources of the Eastern mystical symbolism and the fascination with gurus that appear frequently in popular psychedelic visual culture and music. The

⁷⁵⁰ Belson quoted in Iles, "Liquid Dreams," *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, p. 69.

mystical framework may also have reinforced the counterculture's retreat from the 'straight world'.⁷⁵¹

This 'sober' (in every sense of the word) proposition perhaps requires much consideration. From a contemporary, postmodern, secular perspective, utilising the work of Deleuze and Guattari, we may see somewhat different conclusions drawn regarding the use of intoxicant substances as tools of psychical emancipation. Again, the modernist/postmodernist divide within Sixties culture is evident. Despite the fact that in their own work they drew upon the work of writers who used drugs, Deleuze and Guattari are not advocates of the use of intoxicant substances for emancipatory purposes:

If it is true that drugs are linked to this immanent, molecular perceptive causality, we are still faced with the question of whether they actually succeed in drawing the plane necessary for their actions. The causal line, or the line of flight, of drugs is constantly being segmentarized under the most rigid of forms, that of dependency, the hit and the dose, the dealer.⁷⁵²

Deleuze and Guattari are very sceptical concerning their usefulness as facilitators of the liberation of subjectivity: "Drugs are too unwieldy to grasp the imperceptible and becomings-imperceptible."⁷⁵³ They do not differentiate between more conventional drug users and those addicted to drugs (for better or for worse analytically perhaps), yet they highlight the dangers most eloquently: "Drug addicts continually fall back into what they wanted to escape: a segmentarity all the more rigid for being marginal, a territorialization all the more artificial for

⁷⁵¹ Austin, "Rome is Burning (Psychedelic)," *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, p. 190.

⁷⁵² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 314.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

being based on chemical substances, hallucinatory forms, and phantasy subjectifications.”⁷⁵⁴ That, “instead of making a body without organs sufficiently rich or full for the passage of intensities, drug addicts erect a vitrified, or emptied body, or a cancerous one: the causal line, creative line, or line of flight immediately turns into a line of death and abolition.”⁷⁵⁵

In “*Theatrum Philosophicum*” - his commentary upon on Deleuze’s work - Foucault wrote of the use of such substances with perhaps a more of a positive stance. Within the essay he also concerns himself with of fragmentation and unity which permeates this study:

We can easily see how LSD inverts the relationships of ill humor, stupidity, and thought: it no sooner eliminates the supremacy of categories than it tears away the ground of its indifference and disintegrates the gloomy dumbshow of stupidity; and it presents this univocal and a-categorical mass not only variegated, mobile, asymmetrical, decentered, spiraloid and reverberating, but causes it to rise, at each instant, as a swarming of phantasm-events. As it slides upon this surface at once regular and intensely vibratory, as it is freed from its catatonic chrysalis, thought invariably contemplates this indefinite equivalence transformed into an acute event and a sumptuous, appareled repetition.⁷⁵⁶

Yet Foucault also dismisses the modernist thesis of truth revealed within a psychoactive context, which contradicts the thesis as expounded by Huxley and Leary, along with the religious implications of such thought. In his own words: “Drugs - if we can speak of them generally - have nothing at all to do with truth and

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 315.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 314.

⁷⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, “*Theatrum Philosophicum*,” in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977) pp. 190-191.

falsity; only to fortune-tellers do they reveal a world "more truthful than the real."⁷⁵⁷ William Burroughs also would appear to concur with Foucault's reading, in rather similar language, when he describes how drugs "shift the scanning pattern of 'reality' so that we see a different 'reality' – There is no true or real 'reality' – 'Reality' is simply a more or less constant scanning pattern."⁷⁵⁸ Manuel DeLanda also affirms this secular approach: "I hate mysticism. I've always hated the whole idea of taking psychedelics and then going, 'Western science is bullshit, let's turn to Eastern philosophy'. I always strive to have a materialist explanation for what's going on. I always thought that matter had much more to it than just this inert stuff that sits here. And now I'm being proved right."⁷⁵⁹

The link between psychedelics, madness, and mysticism is given its most eloquent expression in shamanism. The magician is much like a Western version of a shaman, and Anger is much like a shamanic operator with regard to his procedural intent. In the words of Norman: "The shaman is an unrepentant, shameless, but ultimately compassionate manipulator."⁷⁶⁰ The shaman is also an important icon for Laing, as Melechi describes: "In as far as any model underpinned this re-writing of psychosis as a sacred journey, it is shamanism that appears to have been the important influence on Laing's thinking."⁷⁶¹ That "in divesting the schizophrenic experience from the language of pathology and physiology, he sought to accord the returned 'voyager' a status akin to that of the shaman in traditional cultures." ⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁷ Foucault, "Theatricum Philosophicum," p. 191.

⁷⁵⁸ William Burroughs, *Nova Express* (New York: Grove Press, 1964): p. 61, quoted in Danielle Knafo, "The Senses Grow Skilled in their Craving: Thoughts on Creativity and Addiction," *Psychoanalytic Review* 95, no. 4 (2008): p. 571.

⁷⁵⁹ Manuel DeLanda, quoted in Erik Davis, "DeLanda Destratisfied."

⁷⁶⁰ Stuart Norman, "I am the Leatherface Shaman," in *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, ed. Mark Thompson (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991), p. 279.

⁷⁶¹ Melechi, "Drugs of Liberation," p. 48.

⁷⁶² Ibid.

From the realm of the Sixties politics of consciousness, and its attempted negation of the rational - supposedly stable subject - the cognised environment is torn apart. Works such as Anger's are a visceral, shamanic gutting of normative perception and emotional stability; a jarring awake into the immediacy of experience within the confines of the cinematic procedure. One cannot actualise the state of ego loss through art, yet it retains the capacity to provoke intensely alterative psychical states through such sensorial bombardment. Whilst Anger's films certainly do not induce a psychically liberatory experience in the spectator, we see the mode of thinking, the lineage, and the methodological tract that Anger follows. The shamanic ordeal is the extreme conclusion of this line of approach.

In the words of Burston: "Laing held that the pseudo-sanity of the normal person entails a progressive attenuation of authenticity, which erodes his or her critical faculty and openness to transcendental experience. True sanity, he said, involves the dissolution of the normally adjusted ego, which he equated with the false self, in a process that, following Jung, he termed 'metanoia'."⁷⁶³ In this, Laing concurs with Jung's affirmation of the end process of individuation. Jung describes how "the whole course of individuation is dialectical, and the so called 'end' is the confrontation of the ego with the 'emptiness' of the centre. Here the limit of the possible experience is reached: the ego dissolves as the reference point of cognition."⁷⁶⁴ For Laing, "true sanity entails in one way or another the dissolution of the normal ego, that false self completely adjusted to our alienated social reality...through this death a re-birth and the eventual re-establishment of a new

⁷⁶³ Burston, *The Crucible of Experience*, p. 88.

⁷⁶⁴ Jung to a Swiss Pastor, 1955; in *C.G. Jung, Letters 1951-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): p. 259, quoted in Polly Young-Eisendrath, *Gender and Desire: Uncursing Pandora*, (Texas: A & M University Press 1997), p. 93.

kind of ego functioning.”⁷⁶⁵ Within this utopian conception of deconditioning, it was thought to be a shift from alienation to authenticity. Yet, with this consideration of a shift, what was the state of idealisation to which the counterculture looked?

⁷⁶⁵ Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, p. 119.

(4.4) The Crowned and Conquering Child

Within *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969), we see footage of the ritual of 'The Equinox of the Gods', in which Anger runs around a magic circle surrounded by an audience. Anger's eyes are painted to emulate the eye of Ra, his arms are outstretched, he looks back and forth, points a wand at the audience, and generally appears manic, dramatic, and intoxicated. Suddenly, he charges into the audience and stoops to put his hand on a little boy's back, seemingly with tender communicative intent.



Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969)

In an earlier piece, Anger's 1950 work *Rabbit's Moon*, Perriot the clown is situated within an enchanted forest, gazing at and reaching for the moon; longing for that which he can never attain. In his distress he is consoled by two small children

who, akin to guardian angels, offer him comfort, and point the way toward his salvation.



Rabbits Moon (1950)

Both films contain instances of the thematic underpinning of the romanticism of youthful innocence; that of the idealised child so beloved of the Sixties counterculture. In that we have looked toward the counterculture's desire to obtain a specific authentic state, the question remains as to what exactly is that state? The answer lies in the symbol of the child. Anger and the romantic strain of the counterculture held the epistemology of the child as the ideal. In the 'unconditioned state', which is the ideal perceptual modality of attainment, childhood is held as the archetypal form of innocence.

Part of this idealisation of childhood as an archetype of the authentic self is a distinct remnant of the Romantic period. Guignon elucidates the Romantic position: "In our earliest childhood years, and in the oneness with nature

characteristic of pre-reflective, pre-rationalizing experience, we are in touch with a primal truth.”⁷⁶⁶ The Romantic poet Jean Paul wrote: “The smallest children are nearest to God, as the smallest planets are nearest the sun,”⁷⁶⁷ and so too for Wordsworth: “Heaven lies about us in our infancy (1807).”⁷⁶⁸ For Anger and the romantic Crowley, the particular take on this myth is that of the ‘Crowned and Conquering Child’, who is linked to the Egyptian god Horus. Goldsmith writes on Anger’s *Invocation of My Demon Brother*: “The eye of Horus is the film’s most widely recognizable image, and apart from reinforcing the film’s persistent interest in the power of vision (or the power the film might command over the spectator’s vision), it also denotes the mythic defeat of Osiris by his brother, Set, and the subsequent revenge of this defeat by Osiris’ son Horus.”⁷⁶⁹ Horus is the archetype of freedom and herald of the ‘new age’ Crowley believed - as did Anger and much of the American counterculture - was about to unfold with the heralding of the dawn of the ‘Age of Aquarius’. When he came of age, Horus avenged the death of his father by defeating Seth in battle and laying claim to the title of King of Egypt. This mythological tale has direct implications for the wider socio-cultural context of the Sixties - the conquering of the old order by the ‘Crowned and Conquering Child’, which is emblematic of the Sixties desire to destroy the old order through revolution, and replace it with that of the ‘free-spirit’ in all its socio-cultural expressions. As Anger stated - “find a Gnostic Messiah among the flower kids”⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁶ Guignon, *Being Authentic*, p. 53.

⁷⁶⁷ Jean Paul, quoted in *Many Thoughts of Many Minds*, ed. Louis Klopsh (Middlesex: Echo Library, 2008) p. 28.

⁷⁶⁸ William Wordsworth, quoted in *Lectures on the Influence of Poetry and Wordsworth*, by F. W. Robertson (Port Washington: Kennicat Press, 1970), p. 122.

⁷⁶⁹ Goldsmith, “Invocation of my Demon Brother”.

⁷⁷⁰ Kenneth Anger, interviewed by Michael O’Pray, BFI Audio Archive (17/01/1990), National Film Theatre, Southbank, London.

Grinspoon describes how “as the epithet ‘mind detergent’ implies, in some circumstances, LSD had a kind of brainwashing power; it could induce the feeling of having achieved a new identity through death and rebirth of the self.”⁷⁷¹ This childhood innocence, prospectively attained by the use of such substances, is linked directly with the Sixties idealisation of the epistemology of the child, unwarped by forces within the capitalist socio-political system. For Laing and the romantic counterculture at large, the romanticism of the innocent child, free from the stifling forms of systemisation, was the ideal. For the counterculture, and particularly Anger’s primary influence, Crowley, the child was the archetype of unfettered freedom: “The generation’s self-perception as a new culture comprised of those under thirty and not afraid to maintain childhood innocence and primal wisdom. They were not seldom connected to the desire to reverse the myth of progress, and find equal immediacy of access to the distant and the past.”⁷⁷²

In that Anger’s films – and indeed the spiritual strain of psychedelic art of the Sixties – are intended to function as ‘deconditioning agents’, the authentic, idealised state – obtained by the use of such substances – is held to be that of childhood. In the words of Morgan: “In more ways than one, the ‘trip’ revived the fresh, subjective, and wide-open eyes of childhood.”⁷⁷³ Of Laing’s own experiences with LSD, Mullan writes: “He found that it apparently enabled him to somehow re-experience the sensations he might well have enjoyed as a young boy – a primary sort of experience, in which new perspectives would unfold and reveal themselves to him.”⁷⁷⁴ In Laing’s own words: “It was an experience of extraordinary

⁷⁷¹ Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, p. 85.

⁷⁷² Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, p. 28.

⁷⁷³ Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, p. 199.

⁷⁷⁴ Mullan, *R.D. Laing: A Personal View*, p. 74.

familiarity, as though my ordinary experience was transitory and alienation or estrangement from more radical, more primary sort of experience which it seemed I had probably been in as a very young baby, a very young child which I had lost in adjusting to other people's social reality."⁷⁷⁵ Brakhage beautifully expressed the same sentiments of preconditioned perception in his manifesto *Metaphors on Vision*: "Imagine an eye un-ruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. How many colours are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of 'Green?'"⁷⁷⁶

Much of Sixties culture references the idealisation of childhood, represented most centrally by the positioning of William Blake as the very archetype of Sixties poetry. Here we also have a direct link with madness, as Blake was the iconic 'mad poet', whose mental illness granted visions that some might argue were mystical in origin, again reinforcing the theme of madness running throughout the counterculture. Blake's romanticising of the untainted childhood condition is most forcefully expressed in his work *Songs of Innocence* (first published in 1789), which contrasts with his later work *Songs of Experience* (1794).⁷⁷⁷ Blake was also a central figure for Crowley, and he is included in his list of 'saints' of the 'Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica' (ECG), the religious system he founded.⁷⁷⁸ Another key Sixties

⁷⁷⁵ Adrian C. Laing, *R.D. Laing: A Life* (Stroud: Sutton, 1994), pp. 109-10.

⁷⁷⁶ Stan Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, eds. Leo Baudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 199.

⁷⁷⁷ William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

⁷⁷⁸ Aleister Crowley, "The Gnostic Mass," *The Hermetic Library* (Ordo Templi Orientis, 2008): http://hermetic.com/sabazius/gnostic_mass.htm.

example is A.S. Neill's seminal text *Summerhill*,⁷⁷⁹ which was a distinct cultural expression of the Sixties idealisation of childhood, and the importance of the 'free child' in particular. In Neill's view, children were best left to their own devices when it came to education, and were not to be coerced into forms of obedience. Despite the contentious nature of Neill's assertions, the text shows a distinct cultural trend in which childhood innocence is held as the ideal state.

As Wees describes, the Sixties' "affirmations of the 'perceptual innocence of childhood' perfectly suited a period obsessed with new perceptual experiences."⁷⁸⁰ Laing is not alone in Sixties discourse in associating the authentic self with the innocent child. It is a return to a form of primal innocence that is exposed by Laing, Anger, and Crowley. In that Anger's films are constructed as deconditioning agents (like LSD), they evoke the ideal of childhood as that which remains when the stifling conditionalities of socio-political processes have been wiped from the subject. As utopian as this is, the fact remains that this was the ultimate aim of much spiritually associated, drug inspired, and psychedelic moving-image media art of the Sixties. Within the realm of avant-garde film, Anger's aspiration to obtain a form of primal innocence bears many similarities with Brakhage's desire to induce an almost pre-subjective, pre-linguistic form of perception within the spectator. Despite the romanticism of such intent, it lies at the heart of both artists' practice. In the romantic position, the attempted deconditioning through the use of agents such as LSD, along with Anger and Brakhage's aesthetics, is an ultimate process in which the normal subject – supposedly rational, stable, mature, and linear – must be overcome: "One must lose oneself in order to find oneself.

⁷⁷⁹ Alexander Sullivan Neil, *Summerhill* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968).

⁷⁸⁰ Wees, *Light Moving in Time*, p. 57.

One must lower oneself in order to be exalted. One must die in order to live. One must become a child in order to become mature."⁷⁸¹ This was dependent above all upon the process of unlearning. Whatever the plausibility of such an endeavour, the counterculture sought, most fundamentally, to regain a sense of lost innocence. This is summarised most eloquently in the beautiful words Laing writes in *The Politics of Experience*:

As adults, we have forgotten most of our childhood, not only its contents but its flavour; as men of the world, we hardly know of the existence of the inner world: we barely remember our dreams, and make little sense of them when we do...Our capacity to think, except in the service of what we are dangerously deluded in supposing is our self-interest, and in conformity with common sense, is pitifully limited: our capacity even to see, hear, touch, taste and smell is so shrouded in veils of mystification that an intensive discipline of un-learning is necessary for *anyone* before one can begin to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth and love.⁷⁸²

⁷⁸¹ *In Your Light*, <http://thefrankblog.com/>.

⁷⁸² Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, pp. 22-23.

Conclusion

'The Politics of Consciousness Revisited'

Whilst I have refrained from a consideration of the importance of music in relation to the counterculture of the Sixties, the above subtitle is a reference to Bob Dylan's seminal Sixties album *Highway 61 Revisited*, in which one of the central songs, "Ballad of a Thin Man," succinctly encapsulates the protestations of the Sixties counterculture against the ordinary, 'normal', US citizen. The lyric, "Something is happening here, but you don't know what it is. *Do you, Mr Jones?*"⁷⁸³ has been interpreted⁷⁸⁴ as a vitriolic, acidic attack on the standardised, customary modes of subjectivity within mainstream US Sixties culture; illustrating through popular songwriting, the politics of consciousness thematic that I argue encapsulated the given era. The term 'Mr. Jones' is broadly understood by interpreters of Dylan's work to be an allusion to the phrase 'keeping up with the Joneses' - a reference to the prototypical materialistic American modality of subjectivity, so at odds with those forms espoused by Dylan and the counterculture at large. The title also alludes to the primary concern of this conclusion – the politics of consciousness in relation to our contemporary situation; hence the 'revisited' appellation. Whilst this work has concentrated almost entirely upon Anger's practice in relation to the 'Magick Lantern Cycle' of films that he produced during his most prominent and important years of filmmaking, Anger continues to be an active artist; one that I argue is ideologically still firmly entrenched within the countercultural politics of

⁷⁸³ Bob Dylan, "Ballad of a Thin Man," *Highway 69 Revisited*, Sony, 1999.

⁷⁸⁴ Please see Clinton Heylin, *Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades Revisited* (New York: Harper Entertainment, 2003)

consciousness. The question remains; what has my work contributed to our critical appreciation of the work of Anger in relation to our contemporary situation, and indeed, to the wider socio-cultural discourses associated with such practice?

Since Anger's hiatus in the presentation of new filmic works - which began in 1979 and lasted for over twenty years - a spate of new pieces were screened after the dawn of the Millennium; none of which, however, have been widely exhibited.⁷⁸⁵ Anger's primary, and most visible project, however, has been his collaboration with writer, artist, and musician Brian Butler on a project entitled *Teknicolor Skull*. (2008). The work is a multimedia, visceral, intensive assault on the senses, much like Anger's *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969); utilising footage shot by Anger which concentrates upon his most sensorially aggressive formal modes. Anger's official website offers the following description: "Teknicolor Skull is Kenneth Anger's magick ritual of light and sound in the context of a live performance. Along with Brian Butler on guitar and electronic instruments, Anger performs on the Theremin while his psychedelic Technicolor Skull images are projected."⁷⁸⁶ *Teknicolor Skull* directly continues (and in essence encapsulates) the particular manner of Anger's engagement in the politics of consciousness - the attempt to break down the normative modes of perceptual cognisance and standardised subjectivity through his use of a sensorially overloaded filmmaking craft. I hope I have demonstrated throughout this work Anger's firm stance as an

⁷⁸⁵ These are *Don't Smoke That Cigarette!* (2000), *The Man We Want to Hang* (2002), *Anger Sees Red* (2004), *Patriotic Penis* (2004), *Mouse Heaven* (2005), *Elliott's Suicide* (2007), *I'll Be Watching You* (2007), *My Surfing Lucifer* (2007), *Death* (2008), *Foreplay* (2008), *Ich Will!* (2008), *Uniform Attraction* (2008), and, most recently, *Missoni* (2010), a work commissioned by the Italian fashion company of the same name.

⁷⁸⁶ *The Official Website for Kenneth Anger*, <http://kennethanger.org/>.

active aesthetic agent of metaphysical socio-political transformation. The aim is to break down habitual modes of subjectivity that define such an approach; the fragmentation of the homogenous, repressed, egoic psychical construct. Despite the occasionally sublime form that can be found in his films, Anger predominantly does not wish to offer the viewer a 'transformative' experience through meditative serenity; his aesthetic is predominately one of excess. It is in this vein, that Anger is firmly situated as both innovator and precursor. With this thesis, I hope I have provided a distinct apprehension of the particular Sixties ideas that I believe have animated the formal construction of his films.

At a BFI screening of Anger's *Rabbit's Moon* (1950) on the 12th May 2009 - at which Anger was present, and I was lucky enough to be able to attend - he remarked that while he had studied "both hypnotism and magick," the effect of his films was reliant upon "the willingness of the audience."⁷⁸⁷ I think Anger offered a very succinct observation here; the question of whether or not his films have a hypnotic, liberative impact - utopian as this may be - is dependent upon whether one is open and receptive to them. Perhaps, in the words of Martine Beugnet, "to open oneself to sensory awareness and let oneself be physically affected by an artwork or a spectacle is to relinquish the will to gain full mastery over it, choosing intensity and chaos over rational detachment."⁷⁸⁸ To preserve ego boundaries in analytical engagement with the work, rather than relinquish the privileged stance of spectatorship, is an attempt to remove oneself from the work and its capacity to affect us. In the words of Patricia MacCormack: "Those who resist transformation most frequently resist the encounter which brings its ecstasy (*ex-*

⁷⁸⁷ "An Evening with Kenneth Anger, "BFI Screening of Anger's *Rabbit's Moon* (1950), BFI Southbank, London (15th May, 2009).

⁷⁸⁸ Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, p. 3.

stasis, outside of self) into being.”⁷⁸⁹ In the Sixties, when new forms of religion and the widespread use of psychedelic drugs was commonplace, one can certainly presume that the audience were more than willing to be receptive to his work.

However, the point of such questions in relation to Anger’s aesthetic practice is that such films were created with the intention of facilitating some form of change, or release, in relation to subjectivity; yet, what particular interpretive form this reading takes depends upon the modernism/postmodernism thematic that runs throughout the entire stretch of this project. Despite the considerable differences in the two approaches, there is something of a continuity within the states of fragmenting and essentialising; a change in the subject is instigated in both forms, whether it is a prompting toward the pluralistic nature of the self, or the actualisation of an fundamental essence. There is a ‘becoming’ in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, but whether or not that becoming has a teleological, end point – as in the ideal of authenticity offered by such Sixties discourses – is the issue at stake here. The fact that Anger approaches this question from an essentialist perspective highlights the utopian aspects of his work. I hope the comparison between Laing and Guattari’s work has provided a useful analytical tool in relation to the differing approaches towards the possible emancipation of the subject that encapsulated the Sixties counterculture, and to which Anger was most firmly committed.

The essence of the utopian strain within Sixties progressive practice, was that it was illuminative with regard to the realm of consciousness. The illuminative

⁷⁸⁹ Patricia MacCormack, “Perversion: An Introduction,” *Senses of Cinema*, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2004/30/perversion_intro/.

impulse - be it secular or otherwise, i.e. Marxian class-consciousness actualisation, or metaphysical realisation - was central to the Sixties US countercultural movements. Yet, how does this relate to our contemporary situation however? As to the question of what is most urgently needed, the liberation of what may be constituted as the 'individual' psyche, or direct socio-political structural change, I must regretfully inform the reader that I can offer no conclusions on this most difficult, yet pressing of matters; one which has dogged many a greater mind than my own. We may consider, however, the fact that an emphasis upon the 'self' always perpetuates the danger of narcissism, jeopardising the possibility of more socially based forms of emancipation. Perhaps, as Will points out, "a revolution invested primarily in 'consciousness' is bound to be self-absorbed - each revolutionary looking inward, fascinated by the supposed malleability of his or her 'self'. The shaping of the 'self' is apt to be a more fascinating project for the 'consciousness revolutionary' than any mere social reform."⁷⁹⁰ Indeed, within postmodern discourses, the polarisation of self and 'others' is deemed a fallacy, as Turkle argues: "Studying the psyche and studying the social field are not activities that can be meaningfully separated."⁷⁹¹ It is a question, however, that is larger than this thesis permits.

What I will propose, however, is that aesthetic engagement is an indispensable tool in any mode of progressive action. The work of Anger is an excellent example of an aesthetic concerned with psychical emancipation; however utopian or metaphysically questionable this aim may be. With aesthetic practice playing an active part of social transformation, I feel the utopian residues of modernity should

⁷⁹⁰ Will, *Reassessing the Sixties*, p. 8.

⁷⁹¹ Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 153.

in this instance be preserved, and that ultimately the boundaries between art and social activism must remain ambiguous and transversal. Thus, in the words of Gach and Paglen:

With the acknowledgement that the creative act is a self-defining moment that shapes our collective reality comes the understanding that transformation is derived from an active engagement of the forces that shape the worlds around us. Such engagement may shift forms like a doppelganger; yet, its potency is always derived from an amalgam of creative will and material action – an alchemical potion that quenches the transformative thirst of artists and activists alike.⁷⁹²

In a recent article, Michael Walzer writes of the period to which this thesis is concerned and of the necessity of the utopian vision towards it. He describes how in relation to the contemporary sphere

we have all been taught that material conditions are the "root cause" of political action, but high hopes and utopian aspiration are at least as important. If we were ever to renounce those latter two, the rich and the powerful would be a lot more comfortable than they have any right to be...Without the steady pressure or, better, the intermittent uprisings, of men and women in pursuit of some ideal of justice, liberalism will give us only oligarchs and plutocrats....I want only to suggest that, given the natural tendency of political and economic life, dullness also has its dangers.⁷⁹³

Joseph Jacoby, one of the foremost scholars on utopian thought, and one of the staunchest academic supporters for its continuance within relevant discourse, has written two excellent treatise on the subject, entitled *The End of Utopia: Politics*

⁷⁹² Aaron Gach and Trevor Paglen, "Tactics Without Tears," in *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 1, no. 2. (August 2003): <http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org/1/TacticsWithout/tactics2.html>.

⁷⁹³ Michael Walzer, "Reclaiming Political Utopianism," in *The Utopian* (December 14th, 2009): <http://www.the-utopian.org/post/2410107552/reclaiming-political-utopianism>.

and Culture in an Age of Apathy,⁷⁹⁴ and *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti Utopian Age*.⁷⁹⁵ It is his work to which I owe many of my concluding remarks on the utopian aspirations of Anger's work. The concept of utopia is generally described as being innately repressive and has been conceptually linked to some of the worst atrocities in human history. In relation to the modernism/postmodernism thematic, this is, in part, directly linked to the emergent postmodern resistance to what may be seen as any totalising discourse, and its concurrent shift into heterogeneous elements of discursive resistance based in more localised forms. In *Picture Imperfect*, Jacoby observes: "Today most observers judge utopians or their sympathizers as foolhardy dreamers at best and murderous totalitarians at worst."⁷⁹⁶ He describes how such readings rely upon "distending the category 'utopian' to include any idea for a future society no matter how vicious or exclusionary...A recent exhibition of utopias in New York and Paris included photographs of an Israeli kibbutz and a Nazi concentration camp, as if each represented a viable utopia."⁷⁹⁷

The question remains as to what can be learned from the utopian project of consciousness alteration. I believe a possible answer lies in Jacoby's differentiation between what he terms 'the blueprint tradition' and 'the iconoclastic tradition' of utopianism. The differentiation between the two rests on the fact that whereas the blueprint tradition is a pre-determined mode of rigidity, the iconoclastic tradition is more responsive and reflexive. For Jacoby, "the

⁷⁹⁴ Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

⁷⁹⁵ Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti Utopian Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁷⁹⁶ Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect*, p. x.

⁷⁹⁷ Russell Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect*, p. x.

iconoclastic utopians are essential to any effort to escape the spell of the quotidian. That effort is the *sine qua non* of serious thinking about the future – the prerequisite of *any* thinking.”⁷⁹⁸ That to

connect a utopian passion with practical politics is an art and a necessity. As the political alternatives narrow, it may be more difficult than ever. Yet I believe it can and should be done. Without a utopian impulse, politics turns pallid, mechanical, and often Sisyphean; it plugs leaks one by one, while the bulkheads give way and the ship founders. To be sure, the leaks must be staunched. Yet, we may need a new vessel, an idea easily forgotten as the waters rise and the crew and passengers panic.⁷⁹⁹

Most fundamentally, “it is possible, even necessary, to join the pressing issues of the day while keeping an ear, if not an eye, on the future.”⁸⁰⁰ Despite the postmodern lull in such high hopes, perhaps art can function in the realisation of this aim, and whilst we may dismiss the spiritually informed ideas of Anger - and his old mentor, Aleister Crowley – as fringe or irrational, they still contain the glimmer of the utopian vision. Perhaps that alone, is worth preserving after all.

The primary aim of this thesis has been to ascertain some understanding not only of the intended functionality of Anger’s craft, but also the discourses within which he has operated; specifically, within the progressive politics of consciousness; an arena which I believe is just as important now, as it ever has been, as we move so very precariously into the 21st century. I argue what must remain is the recognition that there is more than the epistemological dominant that resides

⁷⁹⁸ Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. xvii.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

upon the icon of capital, along with its forms of subjective homogenisation - the question that lies at the heart of the political consideration of consciousness itself. That we must move beyond the climate so succinctly summarized by Fisher when he states of the by rumination by Frederick Jameson and Slavoj Zizek, that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism....The widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible to even *imagine* a coherent alternative to it.”⁸⁰¹

In the consideration of ways to move beyond such thinking, the importance of the Sixties movements to what may be considered the ‘counterculture’ of the modern era cannot be understated. Katsiaficas writes:

Beginning with the global insurgency of the 1960s, grassroots movements continue to be activated by principles of direct democracy, autonomy, and solidarity. These now seemingly universal desires stand in stark opposition to the entrenched system of capitalist patriarchy. With these unifying aspirations, social movements today remain globally connected, and spontaneously synchronized actions are increasingly international.⁸⁰²

It is these progressive, sometimes ‘utopian’ movements of the Sixties that we have to thank for this, and through an appreciation of the socio-political contexts of Anger’s work, we have a direct apprehension of the implications of Anger’s Sixties practice for our contemporary counterculture. Whilst many socio-political gains have been made since the Sixties, the structural integrity of the system that

⁸⁰¹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley: Zero Books, 2009), p. 2.

⁸⁰² George Katsiaficas, “The Global Imagination of 1968: The New Left’s Unfulfilled Promise,” in *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness*, Karen Dubinsky (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009) p. 349.

perpetuates standardised forms of subjectivity is still intact; thus, while certain conditions have changed, we essentially face the same fight now as we did in the Sixties. As Gary Genosko wrote in 2002:

Market ideology produces a form of serial subjectivity that rewards uniformity through pseudo-singularity and punishes abnormality, on occasion preying upon it, discouraging oppositional, alternative practices, unless dissent is commodifiable and alternative subjectivity is operationalizable for workplace, school, and competitive leisure environments.⁸⁰³

To educate oneself to the underlying forces that shape our lives is perhaps the first step in any such liberation, and so the politics of consciousness remains today, as it was in the Sixties, a matter of the most pressing urgency. In the eloquent words of author Robert Anton Wilson, such a process of illumination is

worth your attention if you have any ambition to become more than just another robot in the great machine of modern society. Blake described that machine as a Dark Satanic Mill. Phillip K. Dick decided it was the Empire's Black Iron Prison. Gurdjieff called it sleepwalking. Alan Watts described it as a cultural madness in which we eat the menu and ignore the meal.⁸⁰⁴

As it was in the Sixties, and so as it is today, we must all, ultimately, as Wilson says, pay far more attention.

⁸⁰³ Gary Genosko, *Felix Guattari*, p. 3.

⁸⁰⁴ Robert Anton-Wilson, foreword to *Portable Darkness: An Aleister Crowley Reader*, ed. Scott Michelson (Solar Books, 2006), p. 8.

Anger's accompanying notes for 1966 screenings of his work:

Sun Sign: Aquarian

Rising Sign: Scorpio

Ruling Planet: Uranus

Energy Component: Mars in Taurus

Type: Fixed Air

Lifework: MAGICK

Magickal Weapon: Cinematograph

Religion: Thelemite

Deity: Horus the Avenger, The Crowned and Conquering Child

Magickal Motto: "Force and Fire"

Holy Guardian Angel: MI-CA-EL

Affinity: Geburah

Familiar: Mongoose

Antipathy: Saturn and all his works

Characteristic: Left-Handed Fanatical Craftsman

Politics: Reunion with England

Hobbies: Hexing enemies, tap dancing, astral projection, travel, talisman manufacture, Astrology, Tarot Cards, Collage,

Heroes: Flash Gordon, Lautréamont, William Beckford, Méliès, Alfred C. Kinsey, Aleister Crowley

Library: Big Little Books, L. Frank Baum, M.P. Sheil, Aleister Crowley

Sightings: Several saucers, the most recent a lode-craft over Hayes and Harlington, England, 1966

Ambitions: Many, many, many more films, space travel

Magical Numbers: 11, 31, 93

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Filmography

Whilst Anger has eleven films currently in distribution, he has many more that are either uncompleted, have never been shown, or simply unavailable. He has had a rather unfortunate history with regard to his filmmaking endeavours, as many have been lost, stolen, or damaged beyond repair. However, the eleven that are currently commercially available are listed as follows:

Fireworks (1947)

Puce Moment (1949)

Rabbits Moon (1950 version)

Euax D'Artifice (1953)

Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome (1954)

Scorpio Rising (1964)

Kustom Kar Kommandos (1964)

Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969)

Rabbits Moon (1979 version)

Lucifer Rising (1981)

The Man We'd Like to Hang (2002)